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Mary's Assumption

By
RAPHAEL V. O'CONNELL, S.J.

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Hail

Holy Queen

Mother of Mercy

Our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope

To thee we cry

Poor banished children of Eve

To thee we send up our sighs

Mourning and weeping

In this Vale

of

Tears

PREFACE

FROM our earliest years we have heard with a deep and holy joy of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven as of a truth, about which there could not be the slightest question. Not that it was always explicitly believed in the Church. We can hardly make so large a claim. Yet it was virtually implied in the persuasion of the Faithful, even in the first ages, that Mary's end was not that of common mortals, but that something quite extraordinary had befallen her at the moment of her departure out of this life. This would explain the readiness with which Christians everywhere embraced the doctrine of the Assumption, as soon as it began to be expressly taught, as a doctrine which they had believed all along, without fully realizing that it was contained in the general idea which they had of Mary's exceptional greatness.

Devotion to Our Lady is not a luxury with her children, but a portion of the solid food wherewith they must be daily nourished, that little by little they may grow "into the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ." And it is sometimes a matter of surprise to their pastors themselves, to see what deep roots it has struck in their hearts. It needs only a suitable occasion to bring out in strong relief the very tender devotion of Catholics everywhere towards the Blessed Mother of God; as for instance the solemnization of the jubilee year of an ap-

parition of Mary, or the proclamation of some new dogma concerning her, or even such an ordinary event as the recurrence year after year of one of her great Festivals.

We may feel assured then that any work, however modest, having for its object to set forth the foundations on which the belief in Mary's crowning glory rests, will be welcomed by the Catholic Faithful as contributing in some small measure at least toward hastening the hour when a new and precious jewel will be set in Mary's diadem by the solemn definition on the part of the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady as a doctrine belonging to the deposit of revealed truth, and which cannot henceforth be denied or called in question without shipwreck of the Faith.

And it would seem that the desirable hour is now at hand when Mary will be thus further exalted before the eyes of the whole world. For it is a well-known fact that before the Vatican Council was interrupted by the political upheaval in Italy, more than two hundred of the assembled Fathers had presented to the Holy See an urgent petition, supported by closely reasoned argument, in favor of the immediate definition of the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption. Since then, in spite of the precarious condition of the Church and of the times, the movement has not been allowed to lapse, but on the contrary, it has rather gained in impetus. Between the years 1900 and 1902 alone, more than a hundred and thirty Bishops subscribed to petitions having for their object the proclama-

tion of the Assumption as a dogma of the Faith, and these petitions were from every quarter of the globe.

Had not the Council of the Vatican been prorogued, as it was, indefinitely and until better days, it is not unlikely that instead of looking forward to the definition with the firm confidence that it will not be much further delayed, we should this long while have been exulting in the infallible certainty we should now possess of the manner in which God has glorified His Blessed Mother.

But the Council, as is definitely known, is soon to be convoked anew, and we hope that the few who read these pages will be stirred to offer up earnest prayers to God that the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, which we already hold to have been Divinely revealed, may in the near future be authoritatively proposed to our belief by the solemn definition of the Church, to the greater glory of Our Lady, and the sweet consolation of her children everywhere throughout the world.

The College of St. Francis Xavier,
New York City,
Feast of the Assumption, 1930.

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MARY'S ASSUMPTION

Chapter I

The Assumption of Our Lady and the Apocryphal Writers

WE look in vain throughout the pages of the inspired writers for any mention of Mary's glorious Assumption into Heaven. Not only do they not depict for us the joyous event, the crowning glory of her thrice-blessed career, but they do not so much as vouch for it as a fact. And yet where was there ever an occasion more wonderful than the passage of Mary from earth to Heaven, when, rising from the tomb, she went forth to meet her Beloved, and was by Him exalted to a throne at His right hand, far above the mightiest of the angelic spirits? The Lord Himself, descending from the seat of His majesty in the highest, and accompanied by endless troops of Angels and saints, came amid universal rejoicing to escort His Blessed Mother to the place in Heaven which had long since been prepared for her.

On the other hand, the Assumption is of its very nature a fact of which mere human testimony could not afford a certain knowledge. There is question of a mystery accomplished, in the main, far out of reach of mortal eyes in the very bosom of God. At most, our witnesses might

testify to having been present when Mary was lifted up from earth toward heaven. They might describe for us what they saw, much as St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, relates the circumstances of Our Lord's Ascension, but here, too, a cloud would have hid from them, in impenetrable secrecy, all the more impressive details of Mary's triumphant entrance into the kingdom of her Son.

We have however no such testimony of eye-witnesses, unless perhaps we seek it in the untrustworthy narrations of the apocryphal writers. Of these there was a luxuriant growth, in the fourth and fifth centuries in particular. They affected a style resembling that of Holy Writ, and aimed at supplying the omissions of the inspired narratives by a multitude of details concerning the infancy of Our Saviour, the life and death of His Blessed Mother, and other kindred subjects.

To give them an authority and a prestige, to which they had no claim, they were commonly put forth under the names of the Apostles or other disciples of Our Lord, but between these unauthentic records and the simple and serene beauty of the Gospel story there exists a marked contrast. For whereas the dignified reserve which is so striking a feature of the latter, is itself a strong argument in favor of its absolute truthfulness, the trivial character of many of the incidents recorded in the apocryphal books, their incoherence and frequent exaggerations, predispose us to regard them in large measure as mere fiction.

They are called apocryphal to distinguish them from

the genuine books of Holy Scripture, apocryphal meaning *hidden,* and hence *of unknown authorship,* unauthentic, uncanonical. They have never been received by the Church into the *canon,* or official list, of the inspired writings, and they have even been more than once condemned by decree of the Sovereign Pontiff.

Yet the *apocrypha* which treat of the "Passing of Mary" (*De transitu Mariae*), are the most ancient Christian documents dealing with the subject, and the source from which preachers of subsequent times have drawn no little of the material with which they have adorned their panegyrics of the Mother of God. Although they do not go directly back beyond the fourth or fifth centuries, yet considering the similarity of style and the identity of the more important details, they seem to be all derived from a common original, of a much earlier date, which is thought to have been the work of a certain Leucius, denounced by Pope Gelasius (A. D. 494) as *discipulus diaboli* ("a pupil of the devil").

Of him little further is known, save that he is credited with having been the author of Acts of various Apostles, which it was customary to read in the assemblies of the Manichean and Priscillianist heretics. Written as early as the close of the second or the opening of the third century, they were disfigured by various heretical tenets, which drew on them the condemnation of the Church. Innocent I, in the year of Our Lord 405, proscribed them in no uncertain terms, nor was the language used by Gela-

sius with reference to them, almost a century later, less formal or less positive. The Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church did not receive them, and Catholics must shun them.

But while censuring Leucius and stigmatizing the works attributed to him, the Pope is not necessarily understood to proscribe as false and unworthy of acceptance all that the latter contain. And so amid the chaff there may be more or less wheat, and we may not at once reject as unworthy of credence details which bear no evidence of heretical or schismatical bias, but which may well reflect the prevailing sentiment of those early times. Even in the works of renegade children of the Church, we find unmistakable indications of the high esteem in which the Mother of God was universally held, and of the signal privileges which were thought to have been hers. Some of the later apocryphal writers, as for instance the so-called Melito, whose *Transitus Beatae Mariae Virginis* ("Passing of the Blessed Virgin Mary"), had great vogue among the Faithful, even long after the decree of Gelasius, profess to have simply chronicled the facts as they were able to gather them by a careful sifting of the misstatements and falsifications of Leucius and other heretics.

No doubt, they, too, have drawn on their imagination for many particulars of the death and Assumption of Mary, or have accepted as reliable history the accounts current among the Faithful in their day. Just how much of their narratives may be regarded as historical, how

much is mere legend, we have no means of determining. It would, indeed, seem that the agreement of such a host of writers with respect to the substance of their story, that is, with reference to the main facts of the Death, Burial and Resurrection or Assumption of Mary, ought to be regarded as a convincing argument, if not directly of the facts themselves, at least of the faith of the Church concerning them. And the faith of the Church once established would react upon the facts so as to place them also beyond dispute.

If the authors of the *apocrypha* were known to us—which is something of a contradiction—or if it were possible for us to reconstruct the conditions or circumstances under which they lived and wrote, we might determine with a greater degree of probability the value to be attached to their narratives. As it is, we would not lay much stress upon them, nor yet, on the other hand, reject them as unworthy of any credit.

But the assent of faith rests upon the word of God, and to show that the assent which we give to the Assumption of Our Lady is an act of Divine faith, we must be able to prove that we have, as guarantee of its truth and certainty, God's infallible word, to which end the *apocrypha* would avail but very little. Happily, and despite the gratuitous assertions of non-Catholic writers, and of some who call themselves Catholics, we are not reduced to dependence on such unsatisfactory evidence.

Chapter II

The Story of the Assumption According to the Roman Breviary

IN spite of the generally unreliable character of the accounts of the death and Assumption of our Blessed Lady, which were current among the Faithful in the fourth and fifth centuries, there is a special reason why we should devote space to a more or less detailed consideration of one of them in particular. It supplies the lessons of the second nocturn of the Office of Matins for the fourth day within the octave of Our Lady's Assumption, and the Church in appointing them to be read by the clergy, and by others having the obligation of choir, would seem to lend some sort of sanction to the story of the Assumption as there recorded. The passage is as follows:

It has been handed down to us from of old, that at the time of the glorious Passing of Our Lady, all the holy Apostles who were then toiling in various parts of the world for the salvation of mankind were in an instant caught up into the air, and borne together to Jerusalem. There a vision of Angels appeared to them, and they heard the chant of Angelic Powers. And thus with glory to God, she yielded up her blessed soul into the hands of her Maker. As for her body, which in an ineffable manner had harbored God, it was carried out for burial amid the hymns of Angels and of the Apostles, and was laid in a tomb at Gethsemane, and for three days the song

of Angels continued without ceasing. At the end of three days the melody of the Angels ceased, and Thomas, who alone had been absent, having come on the third day, and desiring to pay homage to that body which had harbored God, the Apostles opened the tomb, but, search as they would, no where could they discover the sacred body. They found only the cloths in which it had been enshrouded and being refreshed with the ineffable fragrance which proceeded from them, they once more closed the tomb.

Astounded at the extraordinary and mysterious event, they could but conclude, that He whom it had pleased to take flesh of the Virgin Mary, and of her to be made man and to be born—though He was God the Word and the Lord of glory—and who had kept her virginity unimpaired even after childbirth, had also been pleased, upon her departure hence, to shield her sinless body from decay, and to honor it by removal hence before the common and universal resurrection.

There were present then together with the Apostles the most holy Timothy, the first Bishop of the Ephesians, and Denis the Areopagite, as he himself attests in what he wrote to the aforesaid Timothy with reference to Blessed Hierotheus, who was also present on that occasion. ["Once *he* has spoken, any further speech is out of place": so the Areopagite.] For even among our Divinely inspired Pontiffs he shone, as you yourself were witness, when, as you remember, we also and many of our holy brethren had come together to view that body which had given birth to Life, and harbored God. There were present James, the brother of the Lord, and Peter, supreme head and eldest of theologians, and having seen the sacred body, we were all pleased to chant, as each one might, the praises of the infinite goodness and power of God.

Surely, there is in all this nothing but what is uplifting, nothing that could be deemed unworthy of the Mother of God. The passage is quoted from the second sermon of

St. John Damascene on the demise of our Blessed Lady, and is attributed by the holy Doctor to a certain Euthymius, from whose biography he has taken it. Who this Euthymius was we do not know. He is said to have been an archimandrite of Palestine, and contemporary of Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem, whom he makes responsible for his account of Mary's death. The fact of its insertion by the saint in his sermon on Our Lady would at most be of weight as helping to establish the belief of the Church in the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin at the time when the learned and pious Doctor flourished, that is to say, in the early part of the eighth century.

But we cannot be sure that we have him as sponsor for our story, even in this mitigated sense. For the passage containing it is held by able critics to be an interpolation, and though we may perhaps maintain that it is genuine, there still persists the doubt concerning the identity of Euthymius, and a well-founded suspicion as to the entire trustworthiness of Juvenal, on whose word we must finally rely. For although the latter was one of the most prominent of the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451), and one of the five deputed to draw up the Profession of Faith to which all were required to subscribe, and though, upon the termination of the Council, he labored strenuously, in the face of persecution, for the promotion of the orthodox Faith, nevertheless, there still clings to his name the imputation of untruthfulness and dishonesty, where there was question of attaining the ends of his own

personal ambition, and enhancing the glory of his see—a charge which is preferred against him by no less grave an authority than Pope St. Leo, himself.

Neither then on the Euthymian story—which apart from these strictures, would be of the highest importance, as bearing such early and unequivocal testimony to Mary's death and Assumption into Heaven—nor on any other purporting to be the testimony of eye-witnesses of the glorious event, can we so far rely as to make it the basis of our faith in the Assumption of the ever Blessed Virgin. That faith is undoubting and unhesitating, and cannot be made to depend on testimony the value of which is uncertain. It must rest on arguments that are incapable of being shaken, and, in the pages that follow, it will be our endeavor to set forth these arguments in such a way as to make it appear that the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption is part of the authoritative teaching of the Church.

Chapter III

Mary's Death

THERE is no serious disagreement on the part of Catholic theologians as to the fact of Mary's death. No doubt there have been some in the course of the centuries who, as Benedict XIV states, have flatly denied it, and even in quite recent times, in Italy more especially, and in Rome itself, the thesis that Mary was exempt from death, has been ardently championed both in written books and *viva voce* in the lecture room. But the number of those who have subscribed to it, compared with the great bulk of Catholic divines, is quite insignificant, and their teaching has had but little, if any, echo in the minds of the Faithful at large.

On the other hand it is only fair to observe that a distinguished Father of the early Greek Church, St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (or Constantia) in the island of Cyprus (in the fourth century), has expressed himself in terms which seem decidedly to favor their view. He does not assert, nor does he deny, either the death or the burial of Mary. He has his opinion, he says, but he prefers to imitate the silence of Holy Scripture, and affirm nothing either one way or the other. It would seem, however, from his whole manner of speaking, and from his guarded allusion to extraordinary and marvelous happenings, that

his opinion really favors those who maintain the immortality of Our Lady, that is, her exemption from death.

As for St. Ambrose and St. Isidore of Seville, the attempt to align them with the supporters of this view may be dismissed as without sufficient warrant. The first merely says that neither Holy Writ nor profane history teaches us that Mary died a violent death. The sword which was to pierce, not her body, but her soul, was clearly not a material sword. And St. Isidore adds that nowhere do we read of Mary's death, nor anywhere find her sepulcher.

But the chief argument in favor of Mary's immortality is drawn from her Immaculate Conception. The enemies of the latter had argued from the universally admitted fact of Mary's death, that she could not have been exempt from sin, the one thing that has brought death into the world. But Mary's recent zealous champions, reversing the argument, maintain that having been conceived without sin, she could not have been doomed to die. The argument, however, is inconclusive. Death, it is true, has come into the world through sin—this is a fact of which we may not doubt—yet the exemption from death, which mankind was to have enjoyed in the state of innocence, would not have resulted from anything inherent in human nature itself. On the contrary, the tendency of the human organism, once it has attained its full growth, is to exhaustion and decay, and it is further exposed to sinister influences from without. Against this double danger a

special providence would, indeed, have shielded it from within and from without, had the state of innocence continued, but the undoubted truth remains, that death is natural to man.

There is, then, a double viewpoint from which death may be considered: it may be looked upon as a penalty for sin, and it may be viewed as a consequence of our complex nature. Regarded as a chastisement of sin, which it undoubtedly is in the case of the vast majority, it has no claim upon Mary, unless in as much as she, too, intimately united with her Divine Son in all the mysteries of the Redemption, died as He did, on account of sin, that is to say, on account of our sins.

But death may be also viewed as a necessity of nature, against which the state of original justice provided an efficient remedy, consisting partly in a very special providence of God, which kept man from untoward accident from without, partly in the fruit of the mysterious tree of life, which maintained the human organism in the vigor of perpetual youth. When innocence was lost by our first parents through sin, they lost also for themselves and for our whole race the extraordinary privilege of immunity from death, and although God might, had He so chosen, have restored to Mary, together with the other gift of original justice, that immortality which Adam and Eve had possessed for a time, yet for reasons which we shall presently endeavor to fathom, He preferred to leave her subject to the common debt of nature. This indebtedness

of itself implies no moral guilt, and Adam, had he been left in the state of nature, would have died, even had he always remained faithful to God. Hence Mary's absolute freedom from sin does not necessarily imply her exemption from death.

There is, moreover, among the great lights of the Church—if we except only St. Epiphanius—complete accord with regard to the fact of Mary's death. The Fathers whom we shall quote as attesting the faith of the Church in the Assumption of Our Lady, bear witness at the same time to her death. To the Greek Church the Assumption was the "Repose" or "Sleep" of our Blessed Lady, an expression readily understood of a passage, after a brief interval, from death to life, or from the tomb to a throne in the highest Heaven. So, too, the great scholastic doctors, as St. Thomas, Blessed Albert the Great, Suarez, together with the vast majority of the theologians of more recent date, and of our own day, regard the death of Mary as quite certain and as admitting of no doubt.

The Church herself in her liturgy, which is her official prayer, and solemn public worship, is quite explicit in her assertion of Mary's death. In the Mass for the Feast of the Assumption according to the Latin rite, the Secret, or prayer immediately preceding the Preface, is as follows: "May thy people, O Lord, be assisted by the prayer of God's Blessed Mother, and while we know that as touching the condition of the flesh, she has departed hence, let us feel that she intercedes for us in Heavenly glory."

So, even more expressly, in the lesson of the Office for the Feast of the Assumption we find Mary's death plainly asserted. The passage is quoted from a homily of St. John Damascene, who exclaims:

> How should she taste death, from whom the true life has flowed for all? Nevertheless she bows to the law that was passed by Him whom she bore, and, as a daughter of the old Adam, undergoes the old sentence,—for even her Son, who is life itself, did not refuse it—but as the Mother of the living God, is fittingly assumed to Himself.

In early times, in the East especially, there were two separate Feasts, one commemorating the "Assumption," the other the "Repose" or "Sleep" of our Blessed Lady. It is thus that the Christians of those remote days expressed their faith in Mary's death, and at the same time their persuasion that it was but brief and momentary, resembling a gentle slumber, from which she quickly awoke to put on the robe of a glorious immortality.

If, then, it is true, according to the received adage, that as we pray, so we must believe—*lex orandi est lex credendi*—then there is no escape from the admission of Mary's death. The mind of the Church, as reflected in her liturgy, admits no doubt on the subject, and while we may admire, in the efforts of some to disprove the fact, a praiseworthy desire to enhance the glory of the Mother of God, we cannot acquit them of a certain rashness in departing from the beaten path, and hence of seeking to promote Mary's honor by means which must be distasteful to her.

Chapter IV

Why Mary Died

WE are not concerned with the remote cause of Mary's death. She died because hers was a human nature, of itself liable to dissolution. We know, however, that God had safeguarded our nature against decay through a preternatural gift actually bestowed upon our first parents, and intended to be handed on by them to their descendants to the end of time. Why was this gift withheld in Mary's case? Or why was it not operative to prevent her death? In the case of others, sin which all have inherited from their first parents intervened to rob them of their immortality—for death is the wages of sin—and as no one is exempt from sin, not even the infant of a single day, so there is no one who is not doomed to die.

But this reasoning has no application to Mary, who did not sin in Adam, and who was never defiled by the slightest moral blemish. Death would not be for her the chastisement of sin. How, then, account for the fact that Mary died—a fact which Holy Church vouches for with no uncertain voice?

There are many who explain the apparent anomaly by saying that, although Mary was, by a special privilege, exempt from original sin, and from those consequences which partake in any way of the nature of sin, or incline to

sin, or imply disorder in the faculties of the soul, she was not preserved from other defects which are natural to man, and which, while they are consequent upon sin, in the actual order of things, nevertheless of themselves imply only pain or penalty, without any disorder tending to sin. The reasons for the Divine conduct toward Mary in this respect we shall presently consider, but the effect was that both in fact and of right she was mortal like ourselves.

This would appear to be the easier and more obvious explanation of Mary's death. But to some it seems to derogate from the high concept that we should have of Mary's utter sinlessness and of the place assigned to her by God in the economy of the redemption. As indissolubly associated with Jesus in His whole redeeming office, she must be intimately united with Him in His death no less than in the other mysteries whereby He has effected the redemption of the world. For this reason she must die, and for no other. She is not comprised in the common law of death. "This law is not made for thee, but for all" (Esther xv, 13). The law of death is a law of sin, and sin has no part in Mary. If she dies, she dies because of the unique place she holds in the plan of the Redemption, as the new Eve and Cooperatrix with her Son in the sublime office of Saviour of mankind.

There is in Mary absolutely nothing of the direct effects of original sin. With the fulness of grace, she received from the outset the preternatural gifts connected

with the state of innocence—impassibility, immortality and the rest—but with a view to the function which she was predestined to fulfil, God limited these gifts. Although immortal by absolute right, she was mortal as far as was necessary for the discharge of her office as Mother of the redeemed. She will unite the sacrifice of her life and the pangs of her long martyrdom with the Passion and death of her Son, but beyond that, death will have no power over her. Like her Son, she, too, will quickly rise again from the tomb. The shackles of death will not be able to hold her. It will be the second victory of Christ over death.

In this exigency of Mary's office as Cooperatrix in the work of our Redemption, we have a deeper reason for her death, even if we hold that it was directly due to her natural condition, in which she did not differ from the rest of us, being mortal like us, though not for the same cause. Her Divine Son had closely associated her with Himself from the very start. As it was a guilty pair who had ruined us, so it was another blessed pair that wrought our salvation—not, indeed, as though Mary's part in saving us were on one and the same plane as that of Jesus. By no means. For Mary's cooperation was not strictly speaking necessary, nor did she in fact pay any portion of our debt. But the work of the Redemption was so planned by God as to be in the nature of a reprisal against the Evil One, and as the woman took a prominent part in effecting our ruin, so must she, likewise, in accomplishing our sal-

vation. And if on that account the new Eve is everywhere else to be found intimately united with the new Adam, how could it be that in the all-important mystery of His death alone she should be unlike Him?

No; if Jesus died, as undoubtedly He did, then Mary, also, must have died, and for a similar end. Her death, it is true, was not simultaneous with that of Jesus: for she had not yet fully accomplished her part here below in the work of the Redemption, nor attained the full degree of grace and of love which was to be hers for all eternity. But the perfect union between the Mother and the Son, which stands out in relief in the whole teaching of the Church concerning Mary—in the Fathers, in the theologians, in the liturgy—requires that complete immolation of her life which is only possible through death.

It is, as some one has well observed, a Protestant misconception, to ignore the true nature of the Divine love, which has not merely sought to save us, but intimately to unite us, by our own personal sacrifice, to the mystery of our salvation, and the work of atoning for our sins and the sins of mankind at large. The greater God's love for this or that privileged soul, the more He will cause it to share in the great mystery of love, that is, in the sacrifice whereby the world has been redeemed. More love is shown in thus making us expiate our guilt, and so merit pardon, than would be displayed in simply pardoning us.

And it is Our Lord's immense and inexpressible love for His holy Mother, that has made Him choose to asso-

ciate her with Himself, "by an indissoluble bond," in the whole work of undoing the effects of the serpent's bite, through which death has come into the world. Our Lord took to Himself a human body like ours, subject to death, in order that by His death He might destroy the empire of death and of sin. Hence Mary, too, must die, if her co-operation is to extend to the whole redeeming office of her Son.

In addition to this fundamental motive for Mary's death, there are others which more or less it implicitly involves. They are the very same for which Christ died, though, to be sure, they do not hold with equal rigor in Mary's case and in that of her Divine Son. He, though clearly entitled, as the Son of God, to all the preternatural gifts which accompanied original justice, nevertheless took upon Himself our infirmities, in order to pay our debt to the justice of God and atone for the sins of the human race. And so, too, Mary, as the new Eve, indissolubly associated with the new Adam, must drink with Him her portion of the bitter chalice of pain and suffering, to the same end and effect, that is, in order to appease the anger of God, and merit for all grace and pardon. For Mary's death was precious in the sight of the Lord, more than that of any other saint, and hence deserved for us in a broad sense (*de congruo*) what the death of Jesus merited in strict justice (*de condigno*).

Again, by succumbing to the penalty of death, Our Lord made it evident that He was human, like ourselves,

and that His Incarnation was in no sense an illusion. In like manner, Mary's death, similar to that of other women, would be a further proof that her Son sprang from the same human family to which we belong.

What comfort, too, there is for the distressed and afflicted in the reflection that Jesus and Mary have suffered before us, encouraging us by their example to bear with patience all the ills of life? And what a source of confidence we have in the assurance of St. Paul (Hebr. iv, 15), that "we have not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin." And again (*ibid.*, ii, 17), that it was necessary for Him to be made in all things like His brethren, in order that He might become merciful. All of which may be applied to our Blessed Lady, as explaining why she, who was to be for all time the Mother of mercy, must learn in the school of suffering how to have compassion on the woes of her children.

Again, even as Jesus died in order that by His death, "He might deliver those, who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude" (Hebr. ii, 15), so Mary, also, must offer to us in her passage hence the perfect model of a holy death, and by her extraordinary peace and resignation, deserve to be forever the protectress and consoler of Christians at the hour of death.

The Apostle speaks of death as the last enemy to be overthrown. We have, indeed, abundant cause to shudder at its approach: to do so is an instinct of our nature. Yet

we may well take courage in the thought that however dreadful it is in itself, Christ has already vanquished it, and in His victory has associated with Himself His Blessed Mother, whom He permitted to die, but only that by His power she might quickly triumph over death. And Mary, by willingly accepting death, has crowned her resemblance to Jesus, and has pointed out to us the way that we must follow, in order that through the sorrows of a temporal death we may pass to the joys of eternal life.

Chapter V

How Mary Died

WE cannot say with certainty at what age Mary passed from this present life. We have no reliable documents defining the time: we have only a more or less vague tradition on which to base our judgment According to a view, that is rather widespread, she would have departed this life at the age of sixty-three. Others make her age to have been three score and ten years, which the Psalmist sets as the allotted span of human life.

We know that at the time of Our Lord's Passion, His Blessed Mother must have been verging on the age of fifty years, to which we would have to add a dozen more or thereabouts to account for the sixty-three years which are most commonly assigned as the term of her earthly pilgrimage. On the other hand, we know that Mary survived her Divine Son, being present at His Ascension and at the coming of the Holy Ghost on Whitsunday, and twelve years does not appear to be too long a period for the accomplishment of the work, which Catholic authors agree in attributing to her, of watching, with a mother's care and a mother's instinct, over the happy growth and development of the infant Church.

When, then, Mary's work was done, all the Blessed in

Heaven would entreat that she might quickly come and occupy the throne that awaited her beside her beloved Son, and He Himself from amid the brightness of the saints would call upon her to come and receive at His hands the crown of glory which, as a just judge, He longed to bestow upon her. "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone" (Cant. ii, 10, 11).

But what was the manner of Mary's death; what the immediate cause that brought it about? Holy Simeon at the time of the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple, spoke to Mary of a sword that should pierce her soul. But although some have inferred that our Blessed Lady died a martyr's death, there is a question in the prophecy, as St. Ambrose observes, not of a material, but of a spiritual sword: for it was to pierce not her body, but her soul, being no other than the sword of grief and compassion which transfixed her spirit, as she stood beneath the Cross on Calvary.

Nor can we for a moment brook the thought that Mary should have died of bodily illness or of the infirmities of age. These are but the forerunners of the corruption of the grave, and from this, as we shall see, Mary was forever immune. Our Divine Lord did not take upon Himself all sorts of physical ills, but only those which, as possessing satisfactory value, could be serviceable for the work of our Redemption. Hence, while He accepted death of the cruelest kind, He did not submit to the humiliating conse-

quences of death—the gradual decay and destruction of the human organism. Nor did He choose for the same reason to endure such bodily infirmities as we are liable to, but His sacred humanity, as a perfect masterpiece of the Divine handiwork, fashioned by the Holy Ghost Himself, was inviolably safeguarded against all disorder, and immune from disease of whatever kind.

Can we imagine Our Divine Lord dealing otherwise with His Blessed Mother, and permitting sin to imprint its mark of shame on her virginal flesh, of which was the flesh of Jesus Himself—*caro Jesu caro Mariae*—and where there was no such thing as strife between higher and lower nature, no such thing as the conflict of flesh and spirit—the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh? The Fathers of the Church, in speaking of Mary's death, extol her ravishing beauty, and by the very name whereby they designate her passage hence, attest their belief in her absolute exemption from decay. For they invariably describe her death as a "Sleep" or "Repose," and represent it as something far different from ours, far nobler and more exalted than the ordinary death of saint or sinner. But would it have been so had Mary, too, been compelled to endure, like us, the pains and infirmities, which are the usual prelude to our dissolution?

We may be sure, then, that Mary's death did not involve the degradation of her organism. It was not a defeat, but a triumph, as would shortly appear, when her Son bade her rise from her "sleep," and put on immor-

tality. *Concepta sine peccato, concipiens sine corruptione, pariens et mortua sine dolore,* is an oft-repeated formula, received as an axiom among theologians, and placing on the same footing Mary's absolute freedom from sin, and her exemption from pain and corruption, which are the consequences of sin. True, certain physical sufferings imply no disgrace, and possess at the same time an expiatory value, and these we do not intend to exclude from our Blessed Lady, but only such as involve a deformation of the organism, and are thus a beginning of that corruption, which has its climax in the grave.

But if neither sickness nor the debility of age nor anything similar is responsible for Mary's death, how, then, are we to account for it, to what cause must we attribute it? To this the common answer of theologians and ascetic writers is that Mary died of *love.* Suarez says (Disp. xxi, §1, dub. 1): *Vi amoris et ardentissimi desiderii, et intensissimae contemplationis;* that is, by dint of love and the most ardent desire, and by the intensity of her contemplation.

To understand precisely what is meant when it is said that Mary died of love, it will be well to make a distinction which is made by pious writers, between dying *in* love, dying *for* love, and dying *of* love. To die *in* love or holy charity is what befalls all the just who persevere in grace unto the end. For to die apart from love is to die apart from grace and the Divine friendship, and that is to be forever lost. There can be no doubt that Mary died *in*

love, and to say or to think the contrary would be mere blasphemy.

To die *for* love is to die from a motive of charity, worn out with labors for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, as has happened to so many holy men and women; or deemed worthy, like the martyrs, to shed their blood for the sake of Christ and His holy gospel; or it is, at least, actually to accept death in a spirit of love and resignation. Can any one doubt that Mary died *for* love? Did the fire of love which inflamed her all through life, and which prompted every act of hers, grow cool or inactive at the very moment which was to put her in possession of her Beloved for all eternity? It is true, she did not shed her blood for her Divine Son, yet her love for Jesus was as a keen blade piercing her heart, as she stood at the foot of the Cross, and so poignant was her grief as justly to entitle her to be called the Queen of Martyrs.

To die *of* love is to succumb to death in consequence of a blow dealt at the very source of life by love itself. Love is an archer: his hand aims the shaft that severs the ties which bind soul and body together. Or again, love is a fever whose burning flame causes its victim to languish and pine away until it is utterly consumed.

We read in the autobiography of St. Teresa of the seraph who with a fiery dart pierced the breast of the saint inflicting upon it a grievous wound, a symbol of the wound of Heavenly love, of which she must perforce have died, had not a miracle prolonged her life. Of the action

of the Divine love upon the frail envelope which enfolds the human soul, we have many striking instances in the lives of the saints. Thus we read how the youthful Stanislas Kostka, even in the depths of winter, was obliged after Holy Communion, to bathe his breast in cold water, in order to moderate the burning fire of love, which, more than any earthly fever, was soon to consume him.

Similarly, St. Francis Xavier was forced to lay bare his breast to the cooling breeze, lest the heat glowing within should stifle him. And of St. Philip Neri it is related that a ball of fire which entered by his mouth, shattered two of his ribs, thus allowing greater freedom to the beating of his heart, a beating so vigorous as to shake the altar and platform where he stood offering the Divine Sacrifice. St. Teresa, too, of whom we have already made mention, affords us a convincing proof of the devastating force with which the fire of holy love may act on the human organism. For, as the office for her Feast attests, her death was due to an intolerable fire of the Divine love, rather than to any mere physical infirmity.

But if such are the effects of love in the case of the saints, what results may we not expect it to produce in that of the Queen of Saints? For the fire of love which burnt in the hearts of the rest of the Blessed, was in comparison with the flames which enkindled her breast, but as a feeble spark compared with a fiery furnace. For Mary's lifetime was not a brief span of years, but was prolonged to a ripe age of sixty, perhaps seventy years, and at every

moment of that long period, even, it may be, during sleep itself, she ceased not to increase in a wonderful way her rich store of Heavenly grace and supernatural charity so that beginning as she did, with a fund that was already vast and incalculable, and experiencing, especially at three great epochs of her life—the Incarnation, Calvary and Whitsunday—a quite extraordinary effusion of spiritual graces, she attained at the close of her earthly career to "a fulness of innocence and sanctity than which no greater can be conceived under God, and which no one apart from God can so much as understand" (The Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*).

The sublime communications and marvelous favors vouchsafed to the saints are often attended by striking phenomena such as raptures and ecstasies, in which the action of the sensitive faculties is impeded or even suspended. The wonders that are wrought in the higher regions of the soul do violence to its lower self, causing, so to say, a complete upheaval within it, and as it were forcing the soul out of itself. It has been observed, however, that the more the soul approaches its final perfection, the less it is liable to such experiences, doubtless because there is ever less and less disproportion between its habitual disposition and the Divine operation. As the soul adapts itself more and more to Divine things, the frail body, too, becomes in proportion a more supple instrument for such exceptional use as the soul may choose to make of it.

It is not that in the case of the more perfect there are

no longer raptures or ecstasies. On the contrary, these are all the more sublime the more the knowledge imparted is extraordinary, and the more the love that is enkindled is intense. But here everything occurs in the higher region of the soul, and the inferior portion is apparently unaffected.

The most exalted gifts of God beyond question are altogether spiritual. They reside in the higher faculties, whose operations are in themselves immaterial, that is to say, such that the organism has no direct part in eliciting them. Hence there may exist in the soul a love more burning far than that of the Seraphim, without even the least agitation of the nerves or other organic disturbance. This is clearly apparent in the case of our Divine Lord, who, though His soul was ever flooded with ecstatic joy by reason of the Beatific Vision, remained outwardly calm and self-possessed, without giving any indication of the wonders that were taking place within Him.

So, too, we may well believe concerning Mary. It was not in the Divine intention that the marvels which were accomplished in her should at once be made known to those who dwelt and conversed familiarly with her. Hence under a placid exterior she contrived to conceal the wonderful gifts that God bestowed upon her, an effect that was partly due to the extraordinary control which she exercised over her emotional nature, partly to the fact that the more sublime revelations and more intimate caresses bestowed upon her had no echo in the inferior portion of

her being, except in so much as she herself willed it, in order that her spirit and her flesh might exult together in the living God.

When we say, then, that Mary died of love, we do not mean to imply that she died the victim of some overwhelming, violent outburst, which suddenly seized her, and broke for a time the bonds that united her body with her spirit. No; if at the foot of the Cross, she bore up with such incredible calm, even though the sword of grief pierced her very soul, as her Divine Son hung there in the throes of death, we may be sure that she was not less placid or less self-possessed amid the ceaseless assaults of a fire of love a thousand times more ardent than the flame that consumes the Seraphim.

But when at last the moment came that was preordained by God, when Mary by her faithful correspondence with grace, had attained the degree of holiness which entitled her to the immense reward prepared for her in Heaven, then, like the ripe fruit gently detaching itself from the bough on which it has grown; or like the fumes of incense softly rising upward from the thurible from a mixture of sweet-smelling spices, so Mary's spirit left her body at the sound of the voice of her Son, sweetly and urgently bidding her come: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land" (Cant. ii, 10-12).

Mary died of love. It is the voice of tradition, the

common teaching of the theologians of the Church. Bossuet says:

> You need not seek other causes for the death of the Blessed Virgin. Her love was so ardent, so strong, and so inflamed, that it heaved not a sigh but should have burst the ties of this mortal body, conceived not a regret but should have put an end to all its harmony; sped not a desire Heavenward but should have drawn Mary's whole soul after it.

But if for a lifetime Mary's love was ardent enough at any given moment to have utterly consumed her, and yet did not do so, how is it that it did at last actually compass her glorious death? To this we might reply that God Himself, when His handiwork was finished, or Mary, by Divine inspiration, and in a moment of rapturous joy at the sensible apparition of her Divine Son, allowed but a spark from the furnace of love that glowed within her to pass to her heart, throwing her in an instant into a grievous languor which gradually brought on death. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him that I languish with love" (Cant. v, 8).

Little by little, the links between body and soul were dissolved by the resistless force of love. Mary's almost continued ecstasy gave place to the Beatific Vision; suspension of the life of sense was followed by its complete extinction, and, as has been beautifully said, "it was the kiss of infinite love, beatifying and consuming, which withdrew Mary's soul from this earthly life, and caused her death."

Chapter VI

Circumstances of Mary's Death and Burial

WE gave, in Chapter II, the account of the death and burial of our Blessed Lady as found in the Roman Breviary for August 18. The Euthymian story, as it is called, scarcely differs in its main features from the other apocryphal narratives, and it might appear, as we have previously argued, that the substantial agreement of a number of writers as to the principal facts is a sure guarantee of their accuracy. So, indeed, it might be, if our witnesses drew from independent sources, but when apparently they represent but one and the same original, the value of their testimony is reducible to that of the common source upon which they draw. It may be, nevertheless, that this source, however tainted, contains the elements of an Apostolic tradition quite independent of any unorthodox teaching, but of which we possess no contemporary authentic record.

Among the circumstances of the death and burial of Our Lady, we may perhaps be permitted to call attention to two or three, as possessing a special charm. In spite of her intense love for her Divine Son, and the longing she felt to go hence, in order to be forever filled with the joy of beholding Him, Mary was, nevertheless, fully resigned to God's will in her regard, and desirous of nothing so

much as to promote His glory and the welfare of souls. And yet there came at last a day when her work was done, and when she could freely indulge her rapturous yearnings to be inseparably united with her Son.

And Jesus, who designed still more highly to honor her, first sent the Angel Gabriel to bring her word of her approaching death. It was another *Annunciation,* and Christian art has often confounded it with the one properly so called. From paradise the Angel brought with him a green bough, which he presented to Mary. It was a palm branch of extraordinary brilliancy, whose leaves were luminous as the morning star, and, as we may suppose, typified Mary's primacy of grace and merit. It shone resplendent in the hand of the Angel as he announced to Mary the time of her departure out of this world, and it shone with equal luster in the hand of the Apostle who bore it before her sacred remains to the place of interment.

This graceful legend has been handled with skill and delicate sympathy by artists of the ages of faith, who have vied with one another in their efforts to commit to canvas its charming details, and at the same time to give apt expression to their own sentiments of tender piety towards Mary, the Mother of God.

When the Heavenly messenger had departed, and the Apostles, beginning with St. John, had all been transported by Angels, or borne along on the wings of the clouds, to the place where Mary lay dying, Christ Him-

self appeared and lovingly invited His Mother to come, and occupy the throne prepared for her in Heaven. This is a detail that is found in all, or nearly all, the accounts of Mary's death, and surely it is no mere legend. To other saints Our Lord has often shown Himself in their last moments, inviting them to hasten to the Heavenly nuptials. He could not, then, have withheld so comforting a sight from one who was far dearer to Him than all the rest of the saints, and whose eyes were keener far to appreciate the beauty and majesty of the Heavenly Spouse. And while in the case of the saints, as it would seem,[1] it was only an apparition of Christ which their eyes beheld, we may be sure that at the death of His own Blessed Mother, Our Lord descended from Heaven in person to invite her to His blissful embrace. And so in an admirable fresco, which may be seen in the chapel of the public palace at Sienna, Our Lady, at the moment of her departure from life, is represented as reclining gently in the arms and on the bosom of her Divine Son, who has descended in the midst of His Apostles to receive and welcome her.

This detail of the presence of the Apostles at the bedside of Mary, to which they had been miraculously transported from their distant missions, is common to all the accounts of her death, and would seem to imply an early tradition. In paintings representing this circumstance, the Apostles are sometimes seen at the moment of their

[1]Cf. Bona, *De discretione spirituum;* B. John d'Avila, letter to St. Teresa.

miraculous arrival, at others they have already entered the lowly house of Mary, and are bowing down before her, or affectionately pressing her hand.

There remain to be touched upon the circumstances of the time and place of Our Lady's death. As for the former, nothing is known for certain, though it is commonly supposed that she lived for twelve or fifteen years after the Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord. And when we consider the immense treasure of merit and of additional glory, which our Blessed Lady would thus have had the opportunity of amassing for herself, to say nothing of the great help and comfort her presence would have afforded to the infant Church, we like to think that her sojourn here was prolonged for a considerable period of time, both to her own great advantage, and to the joy and profit of her spiritual children.

It is true that some of the apocrypha assign the death of Our Lady to the second year after Our Lord's Ascension, but apart from the general untrustworthiness of those documents, it is impossible to reconcile their statements as to the parts from which the Apostles came for Mary's death, and the lists which they give of the disciples who were already dead, and those who were still living, with dates and facts of sacred history as known from other reliable sources. Thus St. John is said to have come from Ephesus, St. Peter and St. Paul from Rome. But St. John did not go to labor at Ephesus before the year of Our Lord 70, when St. Peter and St. Paul had already

suffered martyrdom, nor does it seem likely, on the other hand, that St. John, neglectful of the sacred trust confided to him by Our Lord, went alone to Ephesus, leaving Our Lady behind him at Jerusalem.

It remains for us to discuss the question of the place where Mary died, but as the place of her death and that of her burial are closely connected, we shall deal with both in the following chapter.

Chapter VII

Mary's Tomb

FROM the time of St. John Damascene, who died A. D. 754, and who gave currency to the Euthymian story, the tradition favoring Jerusalem as the place of Mary's death and burial, has continued to gain momentum, until, following the opinion of experts, we may affirm "that in all likelihood Mary died at Jerusalem."

The town which disputes with the Holy City the privilege of possessing the tomb of Christ's Blessed Mother, is Ephesus, on the coast of Asia Minor. It has found its champions even in recent times, and although the testimonies are overwhelmingly on the side of Jerusalem, those in favor of Ephesus have their weight.

It must certainly seem strange to us, supposing Mary to have been buried at Jerusalem, that certain illustrious pilgrims, including St. Jerome, who visited the Holy City in the course of the fourth century, and who have left us detailed accounts of their visits, make no mention of Our Lady's tomb. Stranger still is it that St. Cyril, who was born at Jerusalem in 315, and was Bishop of that city from 350 to 386, is equally reticent on the subject, although, in his Catechisms, he often treats of the glories of Mary. No wonder that St. Modestus, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 615 to 633, should ask in surprise, how it has come

about that they who were the first to speak to us of Mary have told us nothing concerning her venerable "repose," that is to say, her death.

True, Denis the Egyptian, who came as a pilgrim to Jerusalem after the death of Julian the Apostate, and when St. Cyril was Bishop there, speaks quite at length of Our Lady's death and Assumption, and makes her to have been buried at Jerusalem. But whereas his testimony is very explicit, and would naturally have great value in settling the point at issue, there seems to be some doubt as to the authenticity of his work. Does it really belong to Denis the Mystic, and to the fourth century, or, like so many other apocrypha, did it receive definite shape only a century later?

We have an interesting and charming story bearing on Our Lady's death and burial, which takes us back to about the middle of the fifth century, and which has already been referred to at length. It is that of Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 418 to 458, who, at the close of the Council of Chalcedon, was summoned to Constantinople by the Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria. They had just erected a sumptuous basilica in their city to the honor of the Mother of God, and having heard that the first and most illustrious church of Mary, ever Virgin, Mother of God, was to be found at Jerusalem, in a spot called Gethsemani, where her body was deposited in a tomb, they desired that these relics should be sent to them for the protection of the imperial city.

To this Juvenal replied by giving them an account of what he calls "an ancient and very reliable tradition," according to which the Apostles were all miraculously transported to the Holy City at the time of Mary's death, and were thus present when she died. The other details—the burial of Our Lady, the angelic chant which lasted till the third day, the reopening of the holy sepulcher and the delightful fragrance which was then perceptible to all, together with the miraculous disappearance of the sacred body—all these were then narrated, but especially to our purpose is the fact that, according to Juvenal, the entombment took place at Gethsemani, that is to say, at Jerusalem, and that the story is declared by him to be already in his day, that is, in the middle of the fifth century, "an ancient and very reliable tradition."

It is deeply to be regretted that we have no way of assuring ourselves that it is such, and, hence, must be content with whatever degree of probability we may ascribe to the story, as we have it. At the same time, the witness it bears to Jerusalem as the site of Our Lady's tomb, is confirmed by the testimony of several saintly Patriarchs of that city, St. Modestus, St. Sophronius and St. Germanus, who flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries, and who seemed to have no doubt as to the fact of Our Lady's interment at Gethsemani.

So, too, the Oriental liturgies, which undoubtedly reflect the persuasion of the Faithful, at the early date to which they belong, plainly set forth that Mary was buried

at Jerusalem, that is to say, at Gethsemani, in the valley of Jehosaphat, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Later documents from the eighth century on, works of ecclesiastical writers, menologies, reports of pilgrims, all agree in placing Mary's tomb at the same hallowed spot. The Crusaders, upon their return from the Holy Land, spoke everywhere of what they had seen—the ruined church over the last resting-place of the Mother of God—and of what had been done by Godfrey de Bouillon to repair the ravages of time, and to restore to honor an object of such deserved veneration. The Cistercians, whom the great captain had summoned from Cluny, built in Mary's honor, in the valley of Jehosaphat, an abbey which included her sepulcher, and erected there the church which is still extant, and which pilgrims of the period of the Crusades and of the Middle Ages call by various names: "Church of St. Mary in the Valley of Jehosaphat," "Monastery of St. Mary," "Church of St. Mary," named after the Sepulcher of "Mary most Holy in the Valley of Jehosaphat," "Church of the Assumption," "Church of Gethsemani."

And if Catherine Emmerich, in recent times, has thrown the weight of her marvelous revelations into the scales in favor of Ephesus as the site of Mary's tomb, there are on the other hand equally famous mystics, such as St. Bridget of Sweden and Venerable Maria d'Agreda, who are quite as explicit in maintaining that Mary died and was buried at Jerusalem.

The approval which the Church gives to such private

revelations, does not make them an object of Divine faith, but merely implies that they may be regarded and proposed as probable and worthy of being piously believed. According to Brentano, who acted as a scribe to Catherine Emmerich, and who published in 1752 "The Life of the Blessed Virgin," as written down at her dictation, the pious ecstatic never ascribed to the accounts which she gave of the revelations made to her, anything more than a purely human value. And Brentano adds concerning himself that he

> made no pretense of offering to the reader unpublished documents touching the life of the Blessed Virgin, but merely sought to provide for pious souls interesting and edifying reading matter. This he thought would possess the same sort of usefulness as those numerous figured representations, wherewith Christian art has filled our churches and our oratories, and which are so helpful to piety through the impressions they awaken.

It would be unsafe for one arguing in favor of Ephesus as the place of Mary's death and burial, to repose overmuch confidence in the pretended conformity between the description given by Catherine Emmerich in her Life of the Blessed Virgin, and the discoveries made near Ephesus toward the close of the last century. For while the partisans of Ephesus perceive a striking agreement between Sister Catherine's description and the ruins recently unearthed at Bulbul Dagh, others see an utter lack of correspondence between them. Bulbul Dagh, they say, is not the hill where Mary took up her abode at Ephesus, and

the chapel called *Panaghia Capouli* in no way answers Catherine Emmerich's minute description of the house in which Our Lady lived.

True, the Commission sent from Smyrna to investigate did in their report take sides with those who favored the claims of Ephesus, but at the same time they did so with great caution and reserve. "We are very much inclined to believe"—this was their verdict—"that the ruins of *Panaghia Capouli* are indeed the remains of the house where Our Lady lived." In a case, then, in which the wise are in total disagreement, holding directly opposite views, it would seem to be the part of prudence to withhold one's judgment, and await further proofs.

Meanwhile, we must discuss a different sort of argument, which, were it not for one element of inherent weakness, might seem decisive in behalf of Ephesus. It is taken from the Acts of the Council of Ephesus, an authority quite above suspicion both on account of its ecumenical character, and by reason of its venerable antiquity.

In the year 431, at the conclusion of the Council, in which Nestorius was condemned, and Mary's Divine Motherhood was happily vindicated, the Fathers of the Council addressed a joint letter to the Faithful of Constantinople, apprizing them of the condemnation and deposition of their Patriarch, Nestorius.

Wherefore [they say], Nestorius, the supporter of an impious heresy, having, upon his arrival in the city of Ephesus, *where John, the Divine, and the holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God,* held aloof

of his own accord from the assembly of holy Fathers and Bishops, his evil conscience not permitting him to present himself before it, has, after the third citation, been condemned by a just sentence of the Holy Trinity, and the Divinely inspired judgment of the Fathers, and has been stripped of all ecclesiastical dignities.

The argument in support of the claims of Ephesus to possess the site of Mary's tomb, is found in the words of the above quotations which have been italicized, and which are seemingly incomplete. To complete the sense, those who favor Ephesus have suggested that we add some such word as *lived,* or *died,* or were *buried,* so that the text would read: *the city of Ephesus, where John, the Divine, and the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, lived* (or *died* or *were buried*).

Some have even gone so far as to insinuate that the text was deliberately tampered with, in order to deprive Ephesus of a distinction rightfully belonging to it. But of this there is no evidence whatever, and in fact, though many authors of unbiased judgment have favored some such addition to the text as was suggested above, there is absolutely no manuscript evidence of gap or variant.

Hence the only reasonable course to adopt would seem to be to take the text as it stands, and make what we can out of it. Now in the Acts of the Council we several times find mention of *Mary,* or *Mary, Mother of God,* where evidently the *church* of Our Lady is meant, as, for instance, in the following localization: "in the great church of the city, which is called *Mary, Mother of God;*" or

again, where the third homily of St. Cyril, spoken at Ephesus, is mentioned in the Acts of the Council as having been "delivered at Ephesus against Nestorius, when the seven went down to *Mary*." It will not, then, be an unwarranted explanation of the clause under discussion, if we suppose that its purpose is merely to indicate the titularies of the church in which Nestorius was summoned to appear, and so it will be without any weight as an argument to prove Mary's presence and death at Ephesus.

Furthermore, in the hypothesis of her having died and been buried there, would it not seem incredible that the great St. Cyril of Alexandria, who presided at the Council, and who preached several homilies on the privileges of the ever Blessed Virgin in the basilica of the Mother of God, should have omitted all reference to her life at Ephesus, as well as to her tomb? Yet we observe the same omission on the part of Pope St. Celestine in his letters to the Council, although in one of these he expressly mentions the relics of St. John. Polycrates, too, who was Bishop of Ephesus towards the close of the second century, in a letter to Pope St. Victor, in which he enumerates the distinguished personages who have shed luster upon the Church of Ephesus, fails to say a word concerning the presence or the death in that city of her who would have been the brightest jewel in its diadem.

How account for all this reticence except by the obvious inference that Mary never lived at Ephesus, or, at

least, was not buried there? And yet there remains the difficulty that John, the beloved disciple, did certainly make Ephesus his home, and lived, died and was buried there, and how unlikely it must appear that he would have gone to live there, and left Mary behind him at Jerusalem! But may it not well be that at the time at which St. John made Ephesus the center of his activities, Mary had passed away?

It only remains to add in conclusion, that a like silence of pilgrims to Jerusalem, to which we have already referred, does present a difficulty with regard to the existence at that time of what later on was claimed to be Our Lady's tomb in the Holy City, but the difficulty seems to be less serious than in the case of Ephesus. For the period referred to is an earlier one, when the devotion to the venerable tomb of God's Blessed Mother had not acquired that impetus which it received shortly after, when the apocrypha were multiplied and spread far and wide in many languages. Indeed, the surprising rapidity with which this took place is itself an indication of the existence then of a current of tradition strongly favoring Jerusalem.

The question, however, must remain a doubtful one, though, as we remarked toward the beginning of the chapter, the documents as a whole seem to point to the Holy City rather than to Ephesus.

Chapter VIII

What the Assumption Means

"WHO is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?" (Cant. viii, 5.) This exclamation of delighted wonder is understood by interpreters of Holy Writ as addressed to one another by the blessed spirits at the spectacle of Mary's triumphal ascent to the Kingdom of her Son. And surely, if the Spouse of the great bridal song, the Canticle of Canticles, is the Church of Christ, and each individual soul belonging to it, or at least the more perfect, it is clear that what is said in praise of the Spouse applies with particular force to the Virgin Mother, who is, of all, the most beloved, because she excels all others in grace and charity which alone render us pleasing in the sight of God.

Mary, then, *ascends* to the highest heavens, but not by any inherent power of her own: she mounts upward "leaning upon her Beloved." And here lies the difference between Our Lord's exaltation and that of His Blessed Mother. Christ, being God as well as man, rises on high in His glorious Ascension in virtue of His own infinite power—"walking," as the prophet says, "in the greatness of His strength" (Isaias lxiii, 1)—but Mary is borne aloft by the strength of the Almighty, and hence is said to be *taken up* or *assumed* into Heaven. This same expres-

sion, it is true, is thrice employed in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (vv. 2, 11, 22) with reference to Our Lord Himself, but at an early date the words Ascension and Assumption were appropriated, the one to signify the final triumph of Our Lord, the other to indicate that of our Blessed Lady.

In the representations of art, Mary is often portrayed as borne to Heaven by Angels. That of itself might be allowed to pass, although the conception is untrue. For Mary needed no assistance in her flight Heavenward. But why emphasize an impotence which does not exist, by representing the Angels as endowed with brawny arms and muscular frame, and as endeavoring with effort to lift a burden of which visibly they perceive the weight?

How different is that masterpiece, the "Assumption" of Titian, which may be viewed in the convent dei Frati at Venice! Here the Angels form an escort to our Blessed Lady, who, of herself, soars upward to the embrace of her Beloved. Every thing in the scene is grace and majesty. The Angels, as they hover near, are like cloudlets enkindled by the rays of the sun. They rejoice with festive joy, delighting us by the charm of their beauty, while they gaze admiringly on the person of their Queen.

There are instances in which the word *assume* or *assumption* is employed by the Fathers in speaking of the recompense of the saints. But, in present-day usage the term is confined to our Blessed Lady, nor does it follow that because, when applied to the saints, it refers only to

the glorification of the soul, so, too, when employed in reference to the Blessed Virgin, it should include nothing more. For the Church celebrates a special Feast in honor of the *Assumption* of Our Lady, which she does not do in memory of any other saint, although all have attained to the beatitude of the soul. It is Mary's prerogative, which the Church ascribes to her alone, among and above all the Blessed, that she has, in anticipation of the general resurrection, been taken to Heaven both in body and in soul.

We say *taken* to Heaven, as has already been observed, because the force by which Mary ascended thither did not naturally proceed from her own person, but was a gift bestowed upon her by Almighty God. In Christ her Son, on the contrary, the ultimate source and chief efficient cause of the final glorification of the body, which is the Divine power, is identified with the person of Our Lord, and, hence, does not come to Him from without. It is by His own might in the strictest sense, that He *ascends* to the right hand of the Father. Nevertheless, we may say in truth, if we consider only His human nature, that Christ Our Lord is *assumed* into Heaven, in as much as the force whereby that nature is lifted up, is due in the last analysis to the Divine Person, which is really distinct from the sacred humanity, though hypostatically united with it.

Yet, in a true sense, both Jesus and His Blessed Mother, rise of themselves Heavenward to the place of

their everlasting repose. So on the last day, will all the saints of God, in virtue of a property which they will thereafter share with the risen Body of Christ. For that is the pattern after which the once lowly bodies of the elect will be refashioned, that they may be henceforth like the glorified Body of Christ Himself.

Now the Apostle in a celebrated passage of his first Epistle to the Corinthians (ch. xv), contrasts the human body as it is at present with that same body as it will appear in the resurrection of the dead, where, among various things that he says of it, there is one which seems to sum up all the rest: the human body, in the language of the Apostle, will rise a *spiritual* body. Evidently, however, the meaning is not that our body, when spiritualized, will cease to be a body, and become a spirit—for that would be a manifest contradiction—but that it will be *like* a spirit, and that its properties will closely *resemble* those of a spirit.

But can we determine what will be the attributes of the spiritualized or glorified body? We only grasp the notion *spirit* by contrasting it with *matter*. A body then will be all the more spiritual, the more it is *independent* of matter, and of the laws of matter. Thus it appears that the glorious body cannot be tied down to earth, but must have free scope to transfer itself at will to any part of the universe with the rapidity of thought.

We see, then, that Mary needed not the ministry of Angels to transport her to her home in Heaven. She

ascended Heavenward as a living flame, whose place of rest is on high. The multitudes of blessed spirits who escorted her in her glorious Assumption, did so, not because she stood in need of their service, but in order to pay due homage to the Queen of Heaven in the hour of her signal triumph.

Hence the name *Assumption* well fits this glorious event in Mary's life, there being a twofold sense in which she may be said to be *assumed* to her everlasting home. For first of all, although her ascent may be compared to that of sweet-smelling incense floating upward from the thurible, so gently, so spontaneously does she rise, nevertheless the inner force whereby she ascends is a gift to her from her Beloved: it is not a property accruing to her from nature. And, in the second place, the Angels, whose help is not required to compensate for any impotence on Mary's part, do greatly enhance, by their presence and their joyous acclamations, the splendor of the pageant, whereby the Son of God would usher His Blessed Mother to her throne in the highest Heaven.

It is the moment of her awaking from her brief repose. Humbled, after the likeness of her Divine Son, for a few short days, that, with her Son, she might pay the penalty of a sin in which she had no part, she is now exalted above all the choirs of Angels, and will reign with her Son over all creatures throughout never-ending, blissful ages.

Chapter IX

Tradition and the Assumption
The Latin Church

THERE is no dispute among Catholic divines as to the fact of Mary's bodily Assumption into Heaven. It would be beyond measure rash to deny or call it in question. It would be to go counter to the manifest belief of the Church. Only two things are now discussed in this connection: one, the theological censure to be applied to the denial of the Assumption; the other, how the Church came by her knowledge of this great privilege of Mary. Of the first we shall say enough in a subsequent chapter; of the latter, we shall now speak at some length.

There are but two sources from which we draw our knowledge of revealed doctrine: they are Holy Scripture and tradition, both equally venerable and reliable. The word of God, which is the motive of Divine faith, must have been communicated to us either in inspired writings, or by a duly authorized living voice. We are speaking, to be sure, not of private revelations vouchsafed to individuals, but of such as were intended to be accepted by the whole world as infallible truth.

Now it can hardly be maintained by anyone that the Assumption of our Blessed Lady is set forth explicitly in Holy Writ. We may find there, as we shall see later on,

passages which cannot be satisfactorily explained except as implying the Assumption, and the concept of Mary as revealed to us in the sacred writings does in its completeness involve her full and unequivocal triumph over all the forces of evil. But Holy Scripture does not assert in so many words that this triumph includes her complete exemption from the corruption of the tomb, and her speedy resurrection to a new and glorious life.

We must look, then, to tradition for the clear statement of Mary's exceptional privilege, not that tradition itself has always been equally explicit on this point, but the Church, in the discharge of her teaching office, has gradually awakened to a realization of the full content of the deposit of Revelation which was committed to her, either orally or in writing, from the first inception of her mission.

In the matter of Mary's prerogatives, this awakening would seem to have come about chiefly at the time of the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431), at which her Divine Motherhood was authoritatively proclaimed and the heresy of Nestorius solemnly condemned. This clear enunciation of Mary's dignity as Mother of God proposed nothing new to the belief of the Faithful, yet it had the effect of directing their attention to Mary more and more, and of causing them to seek her intercession with ever growing confidence and frequency, and to devise ever new ways of testifying their love and esteem for her. Meanwhile theologians of Holy Church were busy expanding her teaching concerning Mary, setting forth in clear light

the consequences that were involved in the Divine Motherhood, and attributing explicity to Mary prerogatives which till then were not formally ascribed to her.

In tracing the belief of the Church in the Assumption of Our Lady all the way back from our own day to the remotest periods, we shall not expect to find in these the same explicitness to which we are accustomed at the present time. The Fathers of the earliest ages, occupied as they were with more vital and fundamental questions, seldom spoke of Mary's final glorification, and when they did their language was not as direct as that of those who followed them from the fifth and sixth centuries on.

In appealing to tradition in favor of the bodily Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven, we shall quote in the present chapter from writers of the Latin Church, then in the following chapter from those of the Greek or Oriental Church; after which we shall argue from the sacred liturgy, or official worship of the Church, whether of the East or of the West.

If, then, we begin our study with the teaching of Catholic theologians of the present era, which we may extend back so as to include the great ecumenical Council of Trent, we cannot be otherwise than deeply impressed at the remarkable unanimity of the learned and the simple alike in holding fast to the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, as forming part of the deposit of revealed truth. The pious Faithful make no explicit distinction, from the point of view of the certainty of their ad-

hesion, between the assent which they yield to the Assumption of Our Lady, and that which they give to any other point of Catholic teaching. On the other hand, the theologians of the Church, throughout this epoch of nearly four centuries, are concerned, not so much with establishing the truth of the belief in the Assumption, as with determining the correct theological censure for the opposite opinion.

To quote authorities here in favor of Mary's privilege would be to adduce the testimony of almost all Catholic authors who have touched upon the subject. For almost without exception, they hold that the denial of the Assumption would be rash beyond measure, while some would regard it even as bordering upon heresy.

From the period of the Council of Trent, which may be considered to be the modern period, our next glance would carry us back to the days of the great scholastic Doctors, such as Blessed Albert the Great, St. Thomas, and St. Bonaventure. These rather regard as undoubted the fact of the Assumption, and hence scarcely discuss it at any length. At the same time, though only briefly alluding to it, they have expressed themselves with a clearness and a directness that leave nothing to be desired.

Thus St. Thomas, in his beautiful commentary on the "Hail Mary," where he explains the words, "Blessed art thou among women," says of Mary that she was free from any sort of curse whether of sin—for she never was guilty of any—or of the penalty of sin. For, he says, a triple

curse has come upon man through sin. The first is for the woman, who shall conceive with loss of integrity, shall bear her children with weariness, and shall bring them forth in pain. From this Mary was exempt, conceiving without corruption, bearing our Divine Saviour without irksomeness, and giving birth to Him with gladness.

The second curse was launched against the man, who was to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, and from this Mary is free, according to the saying of the Apostle, that virgins are exempt from worldly cares and live only for God.

The third and last curse, which is common to man and woman, lies in this, that they must return to dust, and from this, too, Mary was free, having been taken up with her body into Heaven. We believe, in fact, says the holy Doctor, that after death she was restored to life, and carried to Heaven, according to verse 8 of Psalm cxxxi: "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place: thou and *the Ark which thou hast sanctified*"—a text, as we shall see, that was very often applied by early Christian writers to the twofold resurrection of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, she being the true Ark of the Covenant, which the Lord has sanctified.

St. Anthony of Padua, in a sermon for the Assumption, exposing the words of Isaias lx, 13, "I will glorify the place of my feet," makes Mary the place to which allusion is made. For the Lord's feet are His lowly human nature, and Mary is the sanctuary that harbored it.

And today [says the saint], He has glorified this spot, raising it up above the Angels. Hence we have evidently the glorious Assumption. That is why it was said: "Arise, O Lord into thy resting-place: thou and the Ark which thou hast sanctified." The Lord arose when He ascended to the right hand of the Father. The Ark which He has sanctified arose when the Virgin Mother was assumed to the Heavenly bridal chamber. Go forth and contemplate admiringly the Mother of the King in the diadem wherewith her Son crowned her in the day of her triumph and glorious Assumption.

Many other distinguished writers of this period might be quoted, but we shall content ourselves with the following from Blessed Albert the Great. In his commentary on the passage of St. Luke, ch. i, beginning with the sending of the Angel Gabriel to Our Lady, after various arguments in favor of Mary's Assumption into Heaven, he concludes thus:

For these reasons and from these arguments based on authority, as well as many others, it is plain that the most Blessed Mother of God has been assumed in body and soul beyond the choirs of Angels. And this in every way we believe to be true.

There was in the Middle Ages a pious belief that St. John the Beloved Disciple was also taken up to Heaven in body as well as in soul—a belief which gave the great Christian poet, Dante, an occasion to give expression in his inimitable way to the common tradition, according to which Jesus and His Mother, and only they, have entered Heaven in the completeness of their natures without hav-

ing to await the general resurrection. Standing in presence of the celestial flame which enveloped the Apostle, the poet strained his eyes to see whether he could detect there his body also; whereupon the Saint addressed him thus:

> Why dost thou daze thyself
> To see a thing which here has no existence?
> Earth in the earth my body is, and shall be
> With all the others there, until our number
> With the eternal proposition tallies.
> With the two garments in the blessed cloister
> Are the two lights alone that have ascended:
> And this shalt thou take back into your world.

Only Christ and His Virgin Mother, the two lights, are in Heaven with the two robes, that is, in the body and in the spirit.

Dante, like the holy Doctors whom we have quoted belongs to the thirteenth century, the classical epoch of the Christian School. We shall now cite by way of example two or three authorities from the twelfth century, which abounds in unequivocal testimonies to the truth of Mary's glorious Assumption. Peter of Celles, who died toward the close of that century, has the following eloquent apostrophe to Mary, in which he paraphrases the text of the Canticle (vi, 12), "Return, return, O Sulamitess; return, return, that we may behold thee."

> Return [he says] from the captivity of the world, because *she* ought not to be subjected to captivity, through whom the slaves

were freed. Return from human nature without corruptibility of the flesh, because as thou wast immune from the corruption of sin, so shouldst thou pass to the immortal life, mortality being absorbed by Grace Divine. Return to the liberty of the glory of the children of God; because as sin never had part in thy mortal body, so art thou worthy to enjoy, even in thy virginal flesh, the same liberty of spirit, which the Angels enjoy by reason of their nature. Return, that we may behold thee in thy beauty; because even as we desire to fix our gaze on the countenance of thy Son, so we desire to enjoy the sight of thee, and to be illumined by the splendor of thy face.

St. Bernard, that devout panegyrist of Mary, rather implies or supposes her Assumption, than states it in so many words. It was the accepted teaching of the Church in his day, as it is in ours, and his words must be read in the light of the universal belief, and their obvious meaning, if they are to be appreciated at their full value as expressing in his inimitable manner the overwhelming joy of the holy Doctor at the glorious triumph of the Mother of God.

Today [he says] she is welcomed by Him whom she herself welcomed when He came to the hamlet of this earth of ours. But with what honor, thinkest thou, He welcomed her, with what exaltation and what glory! There was not on earth a worthier spot than the temple of her virginal bosom, nor was there in Heaven a place more exalted than the seat where Mary was enthroned by her Divine Son. Happy twofold welcome! Hence we read today of that woman who received Christ into her house, a reception that was an image of Mary's reception into Heaven.

What Angel can tell how at the coming of the Holy Ghost upon

Mary, and her overshadowing by the power of the Most High, the Word of God was made flesh? Or who can conceive how great was the glory of the Queen of the world, as she advanced, or with what depth of devotion and affection the whole multitude of the Heavenly legions went forth to meet her; with what glad canticles she was conducted to her glorious throne; with what placid mien, what serenity of countenance, what Divine embraces she was welcomed by her Son, and exalted above all creatures, with the honor which such a mother merited, and the glory which became so great a Son? Happy, indeed, were the kisses imprinted upon the lips of the Divine Babe by His Mother, as with joy she beheld Him reclining on her virginal bosom! Yet think you not that happier still were they which she received today from the lips of Him who sitteth at the right hand of the Father, in that blissful greeting when she ascended to her throne of glory, singing her bridal song, and saying: "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth?" (Cant. i, 1.)

A very remarkable testimony to the bodily Assumption of Our Lady comes to us from Pope Alexander III, who belonged, as St. Bernard did, to the twelfth century of our era. It is remarkable not only because of the venerable character of the witness, who is none other than the Supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ, but also because of the clear and unequivocal language in which he expresses himself. The testimony is found in an instruction issued by the Pope in reply to a petition addressed to him by the Sultan of Iconium. The latter had sent an embassy to Rome asking to be informed as to the teachings of the Church, and the Pontiff in reply, after setting forth other points of Catholic doctrine, has this to say of the Blessed Mother of God:

Mary conceived without detriment to her virginity, gave birth to her Son without pain, and departed hence without being subject to corruption, conformably to the word of the Angel, or rather of God speaking by the Angel, in order that she might be shown to be *full,* not *half full, of grace:* and that God, her Son, might faithfully observe the ancient commandment which he had long since given, that is to say, to forestall with honor one's father and mother; and lest the virginal flesh of Christ, which had been taken from the flesh of the Virgin Mother, should be at variance with the whole.

This was in the middle of the twelfth century. For the eleventh we have the unambiguous testimony of two renowned Doctors of the Church, both noted for their tender devotion to the Mother of God. One is St. Anselm, the other St. Peter Damian. The former thus addresses Mary: "O Glorious Virgin, who didst submit to death, but couldst not be held in durance by the bonds of death: because thou alone, O Virgin, didst bear Him, who was the death of death, and of the grave the sting!"

St. Peter Damian is still more explicit. Pointing out the difference between the Ascension of Our Lord and the Assumption of Our Lady, he says in a sermon on the latter:

Our Saviour ascends to Heaven by the power of His Sovereign might, as Lord and Creator, accompanied by Angels who pay Him homage, not dependent on their help or assistance. Mary is assumed into Heaven in virtue of an uplifting grace, escorted and upheld by the Angels, raised aloft by grace, not by nature.

We need not press too closely the sense of the word *upheld,* that is, *supported.* It suggests the popular notion

of the time, and the way in which artists commonly represented Our Lady's Assumption. St. Peter adds: "The whole multitude of the Angels are gathered together, to see their Queen at the right of the Lord of hosts, in gilded vesture, in her ever-immaculate body."

The tenth century supplies a very clear testimony to the faith of the Church in the Assumption, at a period which was, perhaps, of all the least enlightened. It is from a sermon on the mystery by Atto, Bishop of Vercelli, who died in 960, and it is as follows:

> What wonder is it if Our Lord bestowed upon His Mother in advance an effect of His mercy, which, at the end of the world, He will grant to all the saints? It was not meet that she should long succumb to death, which the flesh, that had been taken from her, had already vanquished.

For the ninth century our appeal is chiefly to the liturgies, to which we shall refer later on, and to representatives of the Greek Church. However, there are also Latin writers who may well be quoted, such as Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, and Haymo, first a monk at Fulda, and subsequently Bishop of Halberstadt. The former, expressing himself in Latin elegiac verse, says expressly, that even as the sacred flesh of God Himself was not subject to the corruption of the tomb, so neither was that flesh from which God had taken to Himself His own body. We have not here, to be sure, a direct affirmation of the Assumption, but only of Mary's exemption from decay. But from the context, where the writer speaks of others whom Our

Lord made to rise from the dead and accompany Him to Heaven, it is evident that incorruption as here understood is tantamount to resurrection to a new life. Haymo's words occur in a sermon of his on the Assumption. Explaining the words of Ecclesiasticus (xxiv, 11), "I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord," as applied to Mary, he says that she did so abide, "because never through sin did she withdraw from the possession of the Lord; so that, by keeping her soul free from lust and her body from decay, she became part of the Divine inheritance."

At some time in the course of the eighth century—it may have been toward the middle, it may have been toward the close—there appeared a celebrated work, incorrectly attributed to St. Augustine,[1] in which the learned author puts forward with admirable clearness and force the arguments for the Assumption that may be drawn from the evident fitness of things, from theological reasons, or from what is called the *analogy of faith.* The treatise is a refutation of certain critics who hesitated about the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption, and in particular of a Letter to Saints Paula and Eustochium, falsely ascribed to St. Jerome, and which had done much to unbalance the minds of many with regard to Mary's glorious prerogative. The author's strategy in opposing the name of the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, to that of another learned Doctor, St. Jerome, had the desired ef-

[1]De Assumptione Virginis, liber unus, Appendix ad opus S. Augustini (Migne, P. L. XL, 1141 sqq.).

fect, and the theologians henceforth addressed themselves with great ardor to the task of elucidating more and more the reasons underlying the great privilege of our Blessed Lady. We shall have occasion to refer again later on to the dispute between the two champions, one of doubt and hesitancy, the other of orthodox tradition.

Another writer, whom we may quote from the eighth century, is the venerable Bede, who, in a sermon for the Feast of the Assumption,—of doubtful authenticity, we must admit—without giving full assent to the opinion affirming it, may be regarded with probability as bearing testimony to the existence in his day of a wide-spread belief in the Assumption, as well as of a solemn Festival celebrated to commemorate it.

Much the same may be said of the attitude of St. Ildefonsus of Toledo, a devoted client of Our Lady, towards what was the common belief of the Faithful at the time. The saint is not always consistent, now affirming the Assumption explicitly, now appearing to speak with hesitation and uncertainty.

St. Gregory of Tours, writing midway in the sixth century, describes Our Lady's solemnity as already customary in the Church and familiar to everybody. From which we gather that it must have existed at least from the beginning of the century, or even earlier still. As for the object commemorated, the saint leaves us no room for doubt.

The Lord [he says] bade the sacred body be borne aloft on a cloud and carried to paradise, where, reunited to the soul, and rejoicing with His elect, it enjoys the good things of eternity in unending bliss. To the chanting of angelic choirs, while the Lord led the way, Mary, the glorious Mother of Christ, was borne hence to paradise.

This, it would seem, is the earliest explicit testimony to which we can appeal in favor of Our Lady's Assumption. Of an earlier period we have only the apocrypha, but even these, as we have seen, are not without their value, as bearing witness to the widespread belief of the Faithful at the time at which they were circulated. They do not assure us of the details as to which they differ, but it would be hard, apart from the objective truth, to explain their agreement on certain particulars, as, for instance, Our Lord's descending in person to receive the soul of His Blessed Mother, and especially their accord with reference to the substance of the fact, which is the bodily Assumption of Our Lady.

And the apocrypha can, it appears, be traced back to the second or the beginning of the third century, and to a certain Leucius who is said to have been a disciple of the Apostle, St. John.

It is well to bear in mind, however, that we do not claim that Mary's Assumption was believed explicity from the first ages, and hence we do not expect to find it expressly stated in documents belonging to the primitive Church. To the point is the remark of Emilio Campana,

who, in his able treatise on "Mary in Catholic Dogma" (p. 633), observes:

> As those wholesome and fertilizing streams of fresh water, which at first make their way for a long distance under ground, and then all of a sudden appear in the light of the sun, with all the impetuosity of a river at its flood; so the belief in the Assumption is found in the primitive Church, but in a latent state; wrapped up and, as it were, buried away beneath an envelope of other ideas, it progressed with the unfolding of those ideas, and the logical consequence of such progress was that the envelope opened, and allowed the new idea to be seen in an already complete state of formation.

Chapter X

Tradition and the Assumption
The Greek Church

TO a branch of the Church torn from the parent stem and devastated by schism, we could hardly look for enlightenment as to the true doctrine delivered to us from the beginning. Yet this was the condition into which the Greek Church was plunged by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, in the ninth century, and by his party under Caerularius definitively about a century and a half later. We shall not ask then of the schismatical Greeks to bear direct testimony to the faith of the Church, touching the glorious Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven. Having forsaken the center of unity, they have no longer in their teaching the guarantee of infallible truth. Neither have they that principle of life and growth and healthful development which the true Church of Christ alone possesses. Instead, they are condemned to a state of hopeless stagnation, which is little removed from death.

And yet the very fact of this stagnation may serve to assure us of the prevalent belief of the Faithful, even in schismatical lands, before the bond uniting them to the center of unity was ruthlessly severed. A doctrine which they now hold in common with the Roman Church, they must have agreed with it in holding before the date of

separation. Otherwise the animosity which they bore the Western Church, would have prevented them from accepting it after the final break.

Only in this sense can the belief of a Church that is in schism be held to be an argument in favor of a doctrine accepted in the true Church, and it is on this ground that we appeal in support of the doctrine of Mary's Assumption to the teaching of the Orthodox Greek Church. This teaching is attested by the reply of the schismatical Council of Jerusalem, held in 1672, to the advances of the Protestants, and by the eloquent homily delivered by the president of the Council, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cyril Lucaris, before his whole clergy and people. In the reply of the Council it is said that

> with reason is the Blessed Virgin spoken of as a great sign in heaven, because she was taken up to Heaven with her body. And although at first her virginal remains were confined within the tomb, nevertheless on the fourth day she ascended to the place where Christ already reigned.

This is doubtless very explicit, but it is not more so than the enthusiastic testimonies of many Greek Fathers, who preceded the schism or at least remained aloof from it, and who, especially in their homilies commemorating the Assumption, express themselves with so much warmth and so much directness, that there can be no possible hesitation as to what they believed or what was the accepted belief of the Faithful at large as well as of the particular congregation which they addressed.

We shall begin with the eleventh century, and follow the stream of tradition once more as nearly as we can to its source. About the middle of that century we have from the monk, John Mauropa, afterwards Metropolitan of Eucania, a wonderfully beautiful passage, occurring in his sermon on the "Repose" of our Blessed Lady.

Today [he says] we celebrate the *Repose* of the Mother of God, the *Interment* of the Mother of God, the *Resurrection, Ascension* and *Exaltation* of the Mother of God; wonders upon wonders: for this Mother of God is *Daughter* of God, *Spouse* of God; this Spouse is a Virgin; this *Queen* would be a handmaid; ineffable fulness and most rich variety of all the Divine gifts. Lo, her mortal life forsakes today this virgin, who is the mystery of the Heavens, the admiration of the Angels, the strength of men, the boast of our race, the hope of the Faithful, a treasure incomparably more precious than any other. Leaving to mortals this abode of death, she departs towards that Life, which she herself has begotten.

Does this surprise you? It should not: for in this ever Blessed Virgin there are only privileges and unrivaled wonders. Whether I consider her before the birth of the Word abiding in her bosom, or in His birth, or after it, it is everywhere only wonders. And the source is ever the same, an august and noble source: the Divine assumption of our human nature, whence it came to pass in Mary's bosom that a Man became God. These privileges and mysteries have each their own Feast. The present solemnity is, as it were, the seal and consummation of the rest. It is the last of Mary's Feasts, and at the same time it is the first and greatest. It is the last in the yearly cycle, the chief one in dignity and efficacy.

She departs: the living throne of God is borne from earth to Heaven; the glorious Ark rises toward the heights; the wellspring of light and the treasure of life pass away to life. But what wonders accompany its departure! Here Christ, surrounded by the

choir of Virtues, descends from Heaven to meet His Mother. See Him, as with filial love He presses to His bosom her who had so often borne Him in her arms. Oh! admirable union of Son and Mother, and touching reciprocity of love! See the sovereign Lady escorted by the Lord of the universe, *Domina a Domino,* the Queen by the King, the Spouse by the Spouse, the Mother by her Son, the Virgin by the Sinless One, the All-Holy by Holiness Itself, the first among all creatures by Him who lords it over all; there enters Heaven a soul greater than Heaven, and the Angels form an escort to a Lady who is exalted above the Angels.

And lo! from another quarter come legions of men from every country on the face of the earth, with the Apostles at their head! See them fall as rain from heaven! What is the meaning of so strange an event? Who are they "who fly as clouds?" asks Isaias. It is no longer a single Elias, or Habacuc, a Paul caught up to the third Heaven. Today he descends with many another, a noble assemblage is proclaimed for the great mystery.

Ah! think you that death will assert its power over the first fruits of life? Or that the grave will hold her who through her offspring will empty the graves? Fear not. Novelty calls for novelty, and the wonders ceaselessly accomplished heretofore in the Virgin demand further wonders. The earth shall not enclose Him who is of Heaven, and corruption shall not invade that which was without stain. The all-pure soul departs first; but the body, which was also exempt from all stain, follows close upon it, sharing the same honors, and conducted by the same glorious escort to the everlasting abode.

Other testimonies to Mary's Assumption might be quoted from the same eleventh century, and even from the less fruitful tenth. From the ninth on the other hand, we have a beautiful passage of Theodore Studita, occurring in his fifth discourse on this subject.

She has left us [he says] in body, but her spirit is with us: from Heaven she puts to flight the demons, having become our Mediatrix with God. Death, introduced into the world by Eve, oppressed the earth with a cruel tyranny. Today, seeking to assail the blessed daughter of a guilty mother, death was put to flight, and its downfall has come from the same source from which it had erst its power. Holy Virgin, I behold thee asleep, rather than dead; thou art borne from earth to Heaven, and from there thou ceasest not to protect the human race. O Mother, thou wast ever a Virgin, because God was thy blessed fruit. And that is why thy death is life, not as our death: for thou art incorrupt in body and in soul.

In the eighth century, we meet with two splendid panegyrists of Mary and her glorious Assumption into Heaven: St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 733), and St. John Damascene (d. 754). St. Germanus, in his first sermon on Our Lady's "Repose," avers that it was impossible that her virginal body, the vessel wherein God Himself had been enclosed, the living temple of the Divinity of her only Son, should remain confined within the burial place of the dead. And he continues thus:

How couldst thou have undergone decay and mouldered into dust, thou who, through the flesh which the Son of God took from thee, hast delivered mankind from the corruption of death? True thou didst vanish out of the midst of men; but it was in order to confirm by thy death the adorable mystery of the Word made flesh; in order, I say, that the God who was born of thee, might be shown to have been a perfect man, proceeding from a real woman and a real mother. . . Was it not for the same reason that thy Son, the God of all things, willed to taste death in His flesh? Thus He has done two astonishing things, one in His own life-giving sepulcher,

the other in thine, which He has quickened with life. For both have in truth received your bodies, but neither has delivered them to decay.

Again, it was impossible that this vessel of thy body, which was filled with God, should crumble away into dust like our common flesh. Since He who annihilated Himself within thee is God from the beginning, and hence Life before all ages, the Mother of Life must dwell together with Life; she must lie in death, as in a momentary slumber, and the passing of this Mother of Life must be as an awakening from sleep.

Elsewhere the same holy Doctor, after having eloquently described the privileges of Our Lady, and the numberless blessings that have come to us through her, continues thus (second sermon on the "Repose" of Mary):

No one can praise thee as thou deservest, so surpassing is thy greatness. But thou hast in thyself thine own praise, for as much as thou art the Mother of God. . . For this reason it was not proper that thy body which had borne God should fall a prey to the corruption of death. True, thou wast laid in the tomb even as we, but that tomb left empty is a proof that thou hast passed from this perishable life to the immortal life of Heaven.

In another charming passage, which is found in the saint's third discourse on Our Lady's "Repose," he makes the Son address His Mother thus:

Death shall not exult over thee; for thou hast borne the Life in thy bosom. Thou wast the vessel that held Me; death shall not break it, nor darkness envelop it in its dismal folds. Come in all haste to thy Son; in gladness would I pay thee My debt as a Child;

I would assure to thee the recompense which thou hast merited by the hospitality wherewith thou didst welcome Me to thy bosom, by the milk with which thou didst nourish Me, and by the motherly care which thou didst lavish upon Me, My Mother. I am thine only Son: it is but natural that thy desire should be to dwell with Me: thou hast no other child to share thy love.

At the same period, St. John Damascene, by his fervent discourses on the Assumption of Our Lady, which are as a perpetual hymn of praise to Mary, did much to enkindle the hearts of the Faithful with that love for her wherewith he was himself inflamed. He has been charged with having shown himself uncritical, in putting faith in the apocryphal story of Euthymius, but it would be unfair to make it appear that he rested his belief on that alone, whereas in reality he goes back to the first sources, tracing the reasons for the Assumption to Mary's stainless Virginity and Divine Maternity.

No [says the saint, in his second homily on the Assumption] it was not proper that the holy Virgin should lie encased within the bowels of the earth. The sacred body which God had taken from her in order to unite it to His Person, arose again the third day without being sullied by corruption; so she, too, must be withdrawn from the tomb, and the Mother must pass to the abode of her Son. . . She, I say, who had received into her bosom the word of God as a guest from Heaven, must herself be admitted by her Son into the everlasting tabernacles . . . that is, into the palace of the great King, the blessed dwelling of our God. . . The Son of God, after having preserved the Virginity of His Mother from all blemish at His birth, must keep it from the common decay after death. . .

She whose heart had been transpierced with a sword, as her eyes remained riveted upon her Son hanging from the Cross, must with the same eyes behold Him seated at the right hand of the Father.

Elsewhere in the same homily, the saintly Doctor thus expresses himself:

Thy stainless body did not remain within the earth; thou wast transported alive to the royal abode of Heaven—thou who art at once Queen, Mistress and Sovereign, and very truly the Mother of God. . . How could she taste death who has given life to all? She does, indeed, submit to the law enacted by Him whom she bore; and as a daughter of the old Adam, she submits to the sentence passed of old; for her Son, though He is Life itself, did not exempt Himself from it. But as the Mother of the living God, she is worthily taken up to Him.

Again in his first homily on the same subject, we read the following:

What name shall we give, most hallowed Virgin, to the mystery that has been accomplished in thee? Shall we call it *death?* True, thy holy and blessed soul has, according to the law of nature, been separated from thy immaculate body; but that same body, though consigned to the tomb, does not abide in death and is not subjected to decay. Even as, in becoming a mother, thou didst not cease to be a virgin, so too thy body, whilst suffering the assault of death, was not disintegrated like ours. By a marvelous transformation, it has become that Divine tabernacle on which death shall have no hold, and which shall continue to live throughout all ages.

The sun may be hidden by the moon, so as to seem to have lost its radiance, but for all that it continues to be the unfailing source whence light proceeds. So thou, source of the true Light, inex-

haustible treasure of life, from whom all blessings have come to us; though for a while thou hast been enveloped in the shades of death, thou sheddest everywhere in streams light, life undying, true blessedness, grace, health and benedictions, without ever being exhausted. . . We shall not say, then, that thy *passing* hence is death. What then? A *sleep,* an exit from this world, an entrance into the abode and glory of God.

Earlier than St. John Damascene by almost a century, our next witness to the faith of the Church will be St. Andrew of Crete or of Jerusalem (d. 675), who is called by either name, having been first a monk at Jerusalem, then later Metropolitan of Crete, and whose life embraces a great part of the seventh century. He has left us two homilies on the Assumption of Our Lady, in the second of which, after appealing to the empty tomb at Jerusalem as proof that her body had been taken from earth, he has the following eloquent passage:

And let no one refuse to believe so surprising a miracle. Remember Elias and Enoch, both caught up to heaven, without passing through the dust of the tomb. . . But why look for examples drawn from others? Are not the many privileges wrought in favor of this holy Virgin sufficient proof of this prerogative? . . . It was doubtless quite a novel spectable exceeding the bounds of human thought—a Woman, whose purity surpasses that of the heavens, penetrating the depths of Heaven with the tabernacle of her body; a Virgin, whom a miraculous childbirth had exalted far above the Seraphim, rising aloft nigh unto God, the author of all being; the Mother of Life exhibiting to us in her person an ending like that of her blessed Fruit, a miracle worthy of God and of our faith.

One of the most striking testimonies to the faith of the Church in Mary's great privilege comes to us from St. Modestus, another Patriarch of Jerusalem, who belonged to both the sixth and the seventh centuries, his death having occurred towards the beginning of the latter, that is in the year 614. In his eulogy of the "Passing" of Our Lady, commonly spoken of by the Greek Fathers as Mary's "Repose," and plainly understood by them as including her resurrection and bodily Assumption, St. Modestus thus speaks:

When this living vessel, which had once borne God within it, had finished its course, it put to shore at the haven of eternal rest, where the sovereign Lord of all things awaited it: the selfsame who through it had saved the human race from the deluge of impiety. . . . God Himself from on high sent a legion of Angels to transport to Him His holy Ark; that Ark whereof David, Mary's ancestor, had sung: "Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting-place: thou and the Ark which thou hast sanctified" . . . ; incomparable Ark, not made by the hand of man, but by that of God; not covered with material gold, but all resplendent with the flames of the holy and life-giving spirit, who came down upon her.

Christ, the Son of God, whom Mary ever Virgin, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, had clothed with flesh quickened by a rational soul, has called her to Himself, and has in turn clothed her with incorruptibility like His own; and crowning her with unrivaled glory, has bidden her enter upon a share of His inheritance: for she is His most Holy Mother. Thus is fulfilled the word of the Psalmist: "The Queen stood on Thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety" . . . O happy *Repose* of the glorious, ever Virgin Mary, whose body, wherein life was enclosed, did not suffer

the corruption of the grave, being safeguarded by the omnipotence of Christ our Saviour, who was formed from that virginal flesh. . . .

Hail, most holy Mother of God! Jesus, Son of God, and King of glory, who had chosen thee to be His spiritual palace here on earth, that, at the same time, He might through thee bestow on us His Heavenly kingdom, has willed to have thee with Him in that kingdom, intact of body and glorious above all, to the glory of His Father and the Holy Spirit.

St. Modestus concludes with these words:

Moreover, as the glorious Mother of Christ, our God and Saviour, who is the giver of life and immortality, she is raised to life by Him, being made partaker with Him of incorruptibility throughout all ages: with Him who brought her back from the tomb, and took her to Himself, *as He alone knows*, to whom be glory and sovereignty with the Father and the Holy Ghost forever and ever. Amen.

St. Modestus, like others of the Holy Fathers, had only disdain for the apocryphal accounts of the death, burial and Assumption of Our Lady, which were current in his day. The details, as found in these, besides being unauthentic, were in many cases conflicting, trivial, and out of harmony with the dignity of their subject. That is why St. Modestus, while affirming the truths of Mary's freedom from corruption and her glorious Assumption into Heaven, prefers to leave in uncertainty the manner in which the mystery was accomplished, being content for the details to abide by the knowledge of Him whose wisdom never fails, and who has at His disposal more than

one way of achieving what He proposes. Hence in the conclusion of the discourse the words, "as He alone knows," which to some might appear obscure.

The testimony of St. Modestus brings us back to the sixth century in which the greater part of his life was spent. He is a contemporary of St. Gregory of Tours, and the Feast of the Assumption, to which they both bear witness, and which is for them no new Festival, but one familiar and long established, must when we consider the distant regions which they represent, be regarded as dating back at least to the previous century, that is to say, the fifth, the century so glorious to Mary, in which at the Council of Ephesus, her Divine Motherhood was solemnly proclaimed.

Beyond that, we may not have explicit statements of the Fathers, affirming the resurrection and Assumption of Our Lady, but we find this privilege implied in the wondrously exalted ideas entertained concerning her glory in Heaven by saints such as St. Epiphanius (d. 403), who was only restrained from speaking his thought openly by the example of the reserve of Holy Scripture in the present matter.

Other ecclesiastical writers of the earliest centuries understood as referring to Mary the great vision of the Apocalypse, in which St. John beheld a wondrous Woman all clothed with the sun, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. She is clad with the sun, because, understanding her to be an image of Mary,

her glory is a perfect reflex of the glory of her Divine Son, and hence includes her resurrection and Assumption.

We are thus brought fairly nigh the very birth of Christianity, and the belief of the Church in Mary's glorification, which we see so abundantly attested from the fifth century forward, is also at one with the belief of the primitive Church, the latter fully harmonizing with it as far as the first few centuries bear any positive testimony touching Mary's special privilege, and offering nothing whatever that could suggest a doubt concerning it.

Chapter XI

Tradition—The Sacred Liturgy

THE liturgy of the Church is her official prayer, her common public service. It is the Divine worship as officially organized by the Church herself, and includes various functions, such as the Mass with its rites and ceremonies, the Divine Office, known as the breviary, and the administration of the Sacraments. In these occur many formulas of prayer often implying a belief in certain definite doctrines, and as the prayers in question are the official language of the Church, we have in them the expression of her mind with regard to various truths, which she thus inculcates upon her children. When it is question of private prayer, Holy Church concedes a certain latitude to the Faithful, and, without holding herself responsible for all that the warmth of their devotion may suggest to them, is content if only what is said, though savoring, it may be, of exaggeration, is in no way opposed to the plain teachings of our holy Faith.

But where she herself positively proposes to us a given tenet, implicitly or explicitly, in her own official documents, we are surely warranted in considering that behind such a point of doctrine we have the authority of the Church, not, indeed, proscribing as false and heretical the opposite view, but, in the exercise of her own universal

teaching office, propounding to the Faithful a definite opinion or assuming a distinct attitude on some religious question.

It is from the liturgy of the Church that we shall draw our next argument in favor of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady. And first of all, the Feast of the Assumption has been observed, as it would seem, from almost the earliest times. We have not direct evidence, it is true, for the period preceding the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431), and yet the homilies pronounced on that occasion by St. Cyril of Alexandria, president of the Council, concerning the glories of Mary, would seem plainly to imply the existence of a Feast in her honor. Nor was this a local celebration only; for other saintly Doctors of the Church, such as Ephrem, Proclus, Methodius, in other parts of Christendom have also their Feast-day homilies exalting Mary and stressing her privileges.

Neither does it offer any serious difficulty to object that the Festival was not known as that of the Assumption of Our Lady, but of her "Repose," her "Passing," her "Pausing," for these words must be understood not according to their etymology alone, but in the meaning given them by tradition, and in the light shed upon them by the homilies of the Fathers, which are all aglow with the praises of Mary, and by the formulas of liturgical prayer in use on those occasions.

In the case of the martyrs, it was customary from the beginning to observe with special ceremony their *birthday,*

that is, the day of their passage to eternal life. So would the Faithful have been sure to do in the case of the Mother of Jesus. Only here the manner of Mary's *passing*, which was followed so quickly by her resurrection, suggested the name "Sleep" or "Repose," clearly understood, however, as a sleep from which there was a prompt awaking to a triumphant and glorious life.

Once the Council of Ephesus had vindicated Mary's claim to the dignity of Mother of God, there was a marked effervescence of devotion to her on the part of the Faithful everywhere, and her shrines and her Feast-days were multiplied throughout Christendom. This increase of fervor had its echo in the apocryphal writings, so numerous in the period closely following the Council, and which were intended to feed the pious curiosity of such as craved to know the details of Mary's life and passage to the other world.

We have remarked elsewhere that it is not the part of genuine historical criticism to reject everything that these works contain, on account of the puerility of many of the particulars in which they abound. They bear undoubted witness to the central fact which they record. If that represents the universal belief of the Christians of the day, we have in the fertile imaginations of the writers an obvious and sufficient explanation of the copious details wherewith they invest the picture. Apart from the persuasion of the Faithful in the fifth and later centuries, to the effect that Mary was taken up bodily into Heaven after death, we

have no satisfactory motive for the extraordinary popularity which the apocrypha enjoyed.

This popularity, then, in so far as it bears on the Assumption of Our Lady, helps to assure us of the fact of the general belief of the fifth and sixth centuries, to which the apocrypha mainly belong. When, then, we meet with explicit testimony to the existence of a Feast in honor of the Assumption at some time in the sixth century, we may without exaggeration attribute it to the one immediately preceding, especially when at our first coming upon it, it has in no way the appearance of a practice newly introduced.

Another valid argument to prove that the Feast of the Assumption dates back at least to the time of the Councils of Ephesus (A. D. 431) and Chalcedon (A. D. 451), is drawn from the fact that it is observed even in the schismatical Churches, which were separated from Rome as early as the fifth or sixth century. Such are those of the Nestorians and Eutychians, who would surely not have accepted a new solemnity from a Church which they considered to be in error, and which, as time wore on, they regarded with more intense aversion.

The first orthodox writer bearing direct and formal witness to the celebration in his day of a Festival commemorating the bodily Assumption of Mary, is St. Gregory of Tours in France, whose death occurred in 596, and whose life embraced the greater part of the sixth century. He may have been overcredulous in assenting to the de-

tails of the apocryphal narrations concerning Our Lady's death and glorification, but with regard to what was the very marrow of all such accounts, that is to say, the resurrection and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, of this he was assured by the fact that the Church herself kept in memory of it a solemn Festival.

In his treatise, "On the Glory of the Martyrs," chapter 9, the saint, after affirming that "Mary, the glorious Mother of Christ, was transported to Paradise, amid the chant of the Angelic choirs, preceded by the Lord," gives a charming account of a singular incident which befell him, as he went on a certain occasion to pay his homage to Our Lady at one of her most venerable shrines. "Her Feast," he says, "is celebrated in the middle of the eleventh month," which according to the old computation would be that of January, the eighteenth of that month having been the primitive date for the Feast of the Assumption. The saint continues:

> In the oratory of Marsac, in the territory of Averno, her relics are preserved [meaning probably relics of Our Lady's tomb]. At the approach of this Feast, I betook myself thither to celebrate the eve, and while in the darkness of the night I hastened towards the oratory, I saw from a distance, shining through the windows, a brightness so intense, that you would have said that there were there a great number of lighted lamps and candles.
>
> Persuaded, then, that other devout people had already preceded us for the purpose of celebrating the eve, I approach the door and knock, but no one answers: the door is locked, and everything is shrouded in silence. What were we to do? We send for the sexton,

whose duty it was to close the door, in order to get from him the key with which to open it, and while waiting for him, we light our candles outside the church, when lo! the door opens of itself, and we enter. But no sooner were we within than, owing, as I believe, to the darkness of my sins, the brilliant light we had seen from the outside vanished. Nor, apart from the power of the glorious Virgin, could we see aught from which that brightness might have proceeded.

St. Gregory, in the work from which this narrative is taken, besides enunciating in the plainest terms the doctrine of the Assumption, describes also the solemn ceremonial with which the Festival was observed in the sixth century, including processions by night, which resembled the torchlight processions at Lourdes in our own day, and doubtless stirred in the hearts of the beholders like emotions of deep and joyous piety.

Martène, in his learned work on "The Ancient Monastic Rites" (*De antiquis monachorum ritibus*) says, speaking of the Assumption, that it was one of the five principal solemnities of the year, and hence was celebrated with the same solemn ritual as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the Feast of the primary Patron.

Hence, not only the day itself, but also the eve was kept with special devotion. And what is true of France, is equally true of the Orient, where even the schismatics prepared for the Feast by a two weeks' fast, that is to say, from the beginning of August, and where for a whole month following the Festival a special rite was prescribed, as with us for Eastertide.

Rome, in all such matters, was accustomed to proceed slowly and with caution, nor can we say when precisely the Feast of the Assumption began to be observed there. Some assign its introduction to the time of Pope St. Damasus, a contemporary of St. Jerome and of St. Augustine, in the fourth century. Others attribute it to the pontificate of St. Leo the Great, in the middle of the fifth century, others still to that of St. Gelasius at its close. But it is more commonly thought to owe its origin there to Pope St. Gregory the Great, toward the end of the sixth century. A century later, Pope St. Sergius established a solemn procession as a feature of the celebration, a practice which was not discontinued till the era of the Protestant Reformation.

The argument for the integral Assumption of Our Lady, which is drawn from the existence of a Festival commemorating it as far back as the sixth century, or even earlier, is valid only if the object of the celebration is in fact what we take it to be—namely, the entrance into Heaven of Mary's whole person, body and soul, and not the glorification of her soul alone. This, however, is evident from the very clear language of the Fathers of the Church, who, in their numerous homilies spoken on the Feast, made it quite plain that the motive of holy rejoicing, which they proposed to their hearers, was the complete and final glorification of the Mother of God.

The same is equally clear from the liturgical books, which contain the formulas of prayer used by the Church

in her public functions. Such books are the sacramentaries, missals, pontificals, martyrologies, menologies, etc. The sacramentaries were for the use of the celebrant of the Mass, and contain what he had to say in that and in other functions. They are distinguished by the names of the Popes to whom they are attributed, or in whose reign they are supposed to have originated. The Leonine, the earliest, is the least satisfactory; the Gelasian and Gregorian are more recent. The last may be assigned with a good deal of probability to the sixth century, to the closing years of which belongs the greater part of the pontificate of St. Gregory the Great, whose name is closely associated with the reform of Church music, but who also did much toward the general reform of the liturgy. The Gelasian sacramentary would seem to have preceded the Gregorian, St. Gelasius, to whom it was ascribed, having been Pope a hundred years before St. Gregory.

A few quotations from the early liturgical books will show how exactly the belief of the Church in those remote days coincides with our own, with reference to the bodily Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven. Thus in the Gelasian sacramentary we find the following passage in the Offertory of the Mass assigned for August 15: "Receive, O Lord, the gifts we offer Thee on this *once more recurring* solemnity of Blessed Mary, because to Thy praise and glory it redounds, that *even thus* she was assumed."

In explanation of the phrase "once more recurring,"

we must observe that at first, even in Rome itself, there would appear to have been two Festivals in honor of the Assumption, one on January 18, the other on August 15. St. Gregory, however, suppressed the earlier Feast, and retained only the latter—a change which was also effected by the Emperor Maurice in the East.

The words "even thus" are more difficult to explain. Do they favor the unlikely opinion that Mary was assumed without having died? Or do they perhaps allude to a miraculous bearing aloft of the body of Our Lady, not dissimilar to what occurred in the case of Henoch or Elias?

The Gothic missal or Mass-book, which was used in Spain before the Mozarabic, and later in France, and which we may ascribe to the sixth century, has the following explicit testimony to the faith of the Church in the mystery of the Assumption:

> The ineffable mystery of this solemn day of the Mother of God is the more to be exalted, because the day is an exceptional one, owing to the Assumption of the Virgin, whose virginal integrity won for her her Son, and whose death was without parallel. No less does she inspire admiration by her passage hence, than she has given cause for exaltation as having been blessed in her only offspring; not alone wonderful in the Child whom by faith she conceived, but also glorious by the manner in which she passed away. By her Assumption she felt not the corruption of death, she who bore the Author of life. With earnest prayers let us entreat the Lord, dear brethren, that through His mercy we may at our death escape Hell, and be borne thither whither the body of the Blessed Virgin was transported from the tomb.

From the same source we have the following no less evident testimony, in the shape of an apostrophe addressed to Mary: "Rightly and happily hast thou been welcomed in thy Ascension by Him, whom thou didst fondly welcome when about to conceive Him by faith, in such wise that the rock might not hold thee enclosed, who wast unconscious of any earthly stain."

Still more striking is the language employed in the prayer for the Feast of the Assumption as found in the sacramentary of St. Gregory the Great. This, as we have said, belongs in all probability to the sixth century, if not to an earlier period, and has the further distinction of having originated in the Roman Church. The passage which we are about to quote, conveys briefly, but pointedly, the whole doctrine of the Church relative to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. It is as follows: "May today's venerable festivity, O Lord, bring us salutary aid, whereon God's Holy Mother underwent temporal death, yet could not be held down by the shackles of death, she who bore Thy Son made flesh of her."

The words, "could not be held down by the shackles of death," seem evidently to imply the *resurrection* (and subsequent Assumption) of the Mother of God, and the appeal in the closing words to the mystery of the Incarnation and to Mary's part in it, as the motive for so singular a privilege, clearly warrants our taking them in the obvious sense. It was from Mary's flesh that the Son of God took His human nature, and surely that was reason enough

for bestowing upon it the privilege of exemption from decay. The words plainly allude to an exceptional prerogative of God's Blessed Mother. But in what would it have consisted, if Mary, like the rest of the redeemed, must await the general resurrection for her complete glorification?

The words have only one meaning for those who read them with unbiased mind, and have been so understood by saints and Doctors of Theology up to the time when some began to question the reality of Mary's privilege. Thus St. Anselm, in his discourse on the Assumption, quotes the words as evidently expressing the truth that it was his purpose to eulogize. And Soto, the theologian, asserts that the prayers of the Church, wherein occurs the phrase, "she could not be held down by the shackles of death," are a proof of Mary's resurrection against those who would deny it.

This prayer of the Gregorian sacramentary was recited at Rome year after year for many centuries, but for some motive, only to be surmised, and at a time not definitely known, a change occurred and the prayer was no longer said. We shall see in the next chapter the opposition that existed for a comparatively brief period to the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption, but which, after the vigorous action of Pope St. Pius V, subsided promptly, giving way to the practical unanimity in its favor which has continued since the days of the Council of Trent.

The liturgy of the Orient is more effusive, or less re-

strained, than that of the Latin Church. In the various forms that it assumed among the different races of the East—Greeks, Syrians, Maronites, Armenians, Copts—when once Christian worship was free to develop itself, we see the same thought of Mary's exceptional position in the plan of the Redemption everywhere expressing itself in language which might at first appear exaggerated. The schismatics of the Orient are, as we have already remarked, witnesses to the unanimity with which the Eastern Churches subscribe to the belief in Mary's glorious Assumption. One or two quotations must suffice to show their enthusiasm in acclaiming it; our space will not allow lengthier citations.

And first of all, let the following serve as a specimen of what the Greek Church has held for centuries respecting this privilege of our Blessed Lady. We read:

Oh, the prodigy! The Most High descending invisibly from Heaven, as became a Son, stretched forth His life-giving arms, and joyfully welcomed the soul of His Mother, bearing thereafter from earth to Heaven the body wherein He once took shelter.

The King of the universe, has bestowed on thee, O Mary, privileges higher by far than on any other nature. As He willed that thou shouldst remain a Virgin in childbirth, so He preserved thy body from decay, and by the Divine Assumption glorified thee, thus rendering a Son's gracious homage to His Mother.

Speak, O Sepulcher, which after that of Christ, art the most glorious of all sepulchers: where is that body, once the tabernacle of the Virgin all pure, and which was entrusted to thee? Lo! it has been caught up on high to the loftiest pinnacle of Heaven.

The Armenians fast for a fortnight before the Feast, which they observe with solemn rites for three days. In their breviary we find the following eloquent passage in praise of Mary:

Today the blessed Apostles and holy virgins gathered together and arrayed in glittering white garments, lit their lamps and sang: "Blessed art thou, ay, thrice blessed among women." Today whilst the most holy Virgin reposed in the sepulcher, they awaited and hoped for the coming of the Lord, and they beheld the Creator come from on High amid the Angels, and in accord with them they said: "Blessed art thou, ay, thrice blessed among women." Today they have beheld the most holy Virgin borne aloft and ascending to Heaven upon a chariot of clouds, to enter there with the prudent virgins, and sing: "Blessed art thou, ay, thrice blessed among women."

[And farther on:]

Today the Angels bore the most pure body of the Mother of God from the lower to the higher sphere; therefore it is that the Church with jubilee chants her new hymns.

Other testimony we have to the solemnization of a Feast in honor of the Assumption in the menologies of the Greeks, and the martyrologies of the Latins. These announce, with a brief eulogy, and for each day of the month, the saint especially honored on that day, or the mystery commemorated. In the Greek menologies the Feast of the Assumption is called the "Repose," but the accompanying explanations make it clear, that the word is meant to embrace the resurrection also and the entire glorification of Mary.

In the Latin martyrologies, whether that of St. Jerome, taken from the more ancient one of Eusebius, or an abridgment of it called *Romanum parvum,* or that of venerable Bede, or of Rabanus Maurus, the name assigned to the Feast is the Assumption. As for the martyrology of Usuard, which was adopted at Rome, probably as late as the fourteenth century, and in which the name was changed from Assumption to "Repose," we shall have much to say when in the following chapter we shall treat of the opposition which for a time was offered to the doctrine of the Assumption.

If we had space at our disposal, we might here quote from a lengthy exposition of the doctrine, which was read for centuries in the Church of Paris, and which is a splendid defense of the truth regarding Mary's final triumph. We should further like to give here a translation of the preface, so full of joyous enthusiasm, which was formerly sung in the churches of the Gallican rite on the Feast of the Assumption. But to do so would, we fear, be out of proportion to the limits set for the present treatise.

We shall close then with the remark that at Milan, where the ancient Ambrosian rite is preserved, a special hymn is sung for the Festival, and that the words of the Gregorian sacramentary: *nec tamen mortis nexibus deprimi potuit*—"yet she could not be held down by the shackles of death"—are still in honor there, although they have ceased to be recited in countries where the Roman rite prevails.

Chapter XII

Opposition to the Doctrine of the Assumption

WERE the doctrine of Our Lady's integral Assumption into Heaven formally contained in Holy Writ, that is, were it expressly stated there, it could hardly have been, for a period of time, a matter of controversy among orthodox Christians. As a matter of fact, however, it did encounter for a while a certain amount of opposition, though by no means as intense, or even bitter, as that which was aroused by the dogma of Papal infallibility or that of the Immaculate Conception. It was due to what was thought to be a lack of evidence in favor of the Assumption, rather than to positive arguments calculated to disprove it.

Cardinal Franzelin, in his classical treatise "On Tradition," distinguishes three stages in the development of dogma: that of peaceful possession, that of doubt and opposition, and that of final triumph. For the Assumption of Our Lady, held at least implicitly, the first of these stages or periods would extend from the beginning of the Christian era to a date subsequent to the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon in the middle of the fifth century. It was the decree of Gelasius in 494 which by its vigorous denunciation of the apocrypha, and of the *De transitu Mariae,* would seem to have given grounds to some for

calling in question not merely the circumstances of Mary's glorious Assumption, but even the fact itself. Not, however, till two or three centuries later, towards the close of the seventh or eighth century—it is impossible to be more precise—did any thing like serious opposition to the doctrine begin to show itself.

At this rather indefinite date there appeared, under the name of St. Jerome, a letter addressed to his friends, St. Paula and her daughter, St. Eustochium, who were supposed to have asked him to furnish them with matter for meditation for the Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady. This he does in such a way as to express his disapproval of the apocryphal *De transitu Mariae* ("The Passing of Mary"), and his fear lest it should lead them to accept for certain what is doubtful. "The only thing that we can gather for sure from what is there set down," he says, "is that on this day Mary died. Her tomb is shown, but now it is empty." He continues:

> I say this because many of ours doubt whether she is taken up with her body, or whether she departed this world without her body. But how, or when, or by whom her most sacred body was taken away, or whither it was transported; whether or not it rose again, we know not, although some maintain that she is already risen from the dead, and together with Christ is clad with a blessed immortality in Heaven. . . And because nothing is impossible to God, we do not deny that this has happened in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, yet, to be on the safe side—without prejudice to faith—it is better to remain satisfied with a pious opinion, than rashly to define what one may be ignorant of without danger.

Owing largely to the prestige enjoyed by the great Doctor of the Church, to whom it was falsely attributed, the "Letter" acquired considerable vogue, and succeeded in unsettling the minds of many, who had previously regarded the Assumption as an undoubted truth not to be called in question by any sincere Christian. It was the chief source of opposition to the commonly received teaching of the Church with regard to Mary's final glorification.

Happily, a reply to this bit of destructive criticism was soon forthcoming, and to give it greater weight from the outset, it was issued under the name of St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, whose reputation as an authority in all questions appertaining to faith, is unsurpassed. The work achieved its purpose, and while the simple Faithful continued to believe concerning our Blessed Lady as they had believed before, many of the learned, whose assurance had been shaken by the earlier treatise and still more by the fame of its reputed author, began to breathe freely, and fearlessly to champion the crowning privilege of Our Lady.

Certainly, without the light that is shed upon the whole theology of Mary by the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which was not proclaimed till these later days, it would be hard to imagine how a writer could have presented a more satisfactory defence of the doctrine of the Assumption, in which the reasoning was more cogent or better sustained than in this treatise ascribed to St. Augustine.[1]

[1]Cf. footnote 1, Chapter IX.

Nevertheless, the attitude of doubt towards the doctrine of the Assumption, which had been the direct result of the "Letter" of pseudo-Jerome, persisted in the minds of many up to the close of the tenth century. For this the chief share of responsibility may safely be laid to the account of the Benedictine monk, Usuard, whose *Martyrologium* was widely read in the Church for centuries in the Divine Office. The Feast of the Assumption, less uncompromisingly called "Repose," is thus announced:

> The Repose of the holy Mother of God, whose most sacred body is not found on earth; nevertheless loving Mother Church so keeps with joy its revered memory, as not to doubt that, conformably to the condition of the flesh, it has passed away. But by what Divine plan or purpose that venerable temple of the Holy Ghost has been hidden away, the Church, with her customary reserve, has preferred to remain in pious ignorance, rather than hold and teach anything frivolous and apocryphal.

When precisely this martyrology was adopted at Rome is uncertain. The Feast of the Assumption was observed there under that express name, and with great solemnity for ages, but—in the fourteenth century, it may be, during the stay of the Popes at Avignon—a change was introduced, and the explicit assertion of Mary's real corporal Assumption, together with the prayer *Veneranda nobis etc.* of the Gregorian sacramentary, in which it is so clearly set forth, are made to yield to the hesitating formula of the martyrology of Usuard, and to other passages taken from the apocryphal "Letter" to Paula and Eustochium.

This condition of things continued at Rome, in spite of certain evident incongruities, until, in the sixteenth century, the saintly Pope Pius V ordered everything to be expunged from the Office, which could be suggestive of doubt with regard to the reality of Mary's physical Assumption, at the same time causing the introduction into the breviary, for the fourth day within the octave of the Feast, of the lessons from St. John Damascene, which are so explicit as to the privilege in question. For all that, the Gregorian prayer, *Veneranda nobis etc.* was not, and has not thus far been restored to its place in the Roman liturgy.

In France, which was conspicuous from an early period for the warmth of its devotion to the Assumption, and most zealous in defending this privilege when assailed, the formula of the martyrology of Usuard, which was read year after year upon the occurrence of the Feast, could hardly have failed of having some effect in shaping the opinion of those who listened to it. And yet in the year 1540, when it became necessary to replace the worn copy of the martyrology by a new one, the occasion was hailed as an opportune moment for getting rid of the offending text of Usuard, and substituting for it one that would express unequivocally the common belief in the corporeal Assumption of our Blessed Lady.

For more than a century, the new wording was retained. But in the year 1668, when it was again desirable to replace the copy of the martyrology then in use by another in better condition, some suggested a return to the

old reading of Usuard. To this proposal the Chapter of Paris acceded, and the following year Claude Joly, canon of Notre Dame, published a dissertation in support of it. This gave rise to a warm controversy, in which two other canons of Notre Dame undertook to defend Our Lady's privilege, whereas certain Jansenists—need it surprise us? —and conspicuous among them, Jean Launoy, sought to refute their arguments and expose their pretended errors.

Somewhat later in the same century, the learned critic, Tillemont, while not denying the Assumption, nor the fact of the universal pious belief of the Faithful in that privilege of Our Lady, asserts that it has not the support either of the Fathers of the Church, and ecclesiastical tradition, or of historical monuments—a negative argument, which, he admits, is not conclusive, since God could have raised Mary to life again, had He so willed. He spoke, he claimed, as an historian, not as a theologian.

Early in the following century, another erudite historian, Natalis Alexander, O.P., following the same historical method, endeavored by every sort of argument to prove that the belief in the Assumption had no solid foundation in history. On being censured, however, by his superiors and obliged to retract, he did so in unequivocal terms, declaring that he had never doubted, nor thought it possible to call in question the resurrection and Assumption of the Blessed Mother of God.

The unanimity of opinion on this head, among the learned, no less than among the simple Faithful, was now

so pronounced, that when, towards the close of the eighteenth century, a certain professor of the University of Louvain had the hardihood to cast doubt upon the reality of Mary's Assumption, the whole Faculty rose up to rebuke him, and forced him to disown his erroneous views.

The period of struggle was at an end: in fact, it might be said to have ended with the fifteenth century. For from that time forward there was such universal accord among Catholic theologians with reference to the Assumption of Our Lady, that to deny it or cast doubt upon it, would have been regarded as scandalous.

It is henceforth the era of triumph for the doctrine which asserts it, a triumph that is becoming more and more complete from day to day. A Catholic can no longer deny it without putting himself in opposition to the evident teaching of the Church, and, hence, without committing a sin of grave temerity, and rendering himself liable to the suspicion of heresy. The one thing that is lacking to render the victory full and decisive, is the solemn definition by the Sovereign Pontiff, declaring in formal terms, that the doctrine of the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven in body and soul has been Divinely revealed, and is an integral part of the deposit of Faith. To this happy event we look forward with confidence as to a consummation, for which the Catholic world is already ripe, and which, we feel sure, cannot now be long delayed.

Chapter XIII

Certainty of the Assumption

AFTER studying our question—of the bodily Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven—at one of the two main sources of revealed truth, that is to say, in tradition or the writings of the Fathers, we shall now proceed to show, upon the authority of the theologians of the Church, that it is no mere opinion, however pious, which ascribes to her this glorious prerogative, but that it is an undoubted truth, which no Catholic is at liberty to deny.

We do not say that to refuse to assent to it would be to put oneself outside the pale of Holy Church. For however certain the fact of the Assumption may be, its denial would not be heretical for the simple reason that the Church has as yet pronounced no definitive judgment in the matter. On the other hand, one is not free on that account to accept or reject it at will. For while the contrary opinion may not deserve to be branded as heresy, it does not follow, nevertheless, that it may not be aptly stigmatized in some other way.

The Church, in condemning unsound doctrines or opinions, makes use of certain censures expressing various shades or degrees of unorthodoxy, but when no such official declaration is forthcoming, it is to Catholic theologians that we must have recourse, if we would be guided aright

in passing judgment on a doctrine that is in dispute. The verdict, when unanimous or quasi-unanimous, is a sure guarantee that what they agree in affirming is true. An opinion which is supported by the concordant judgment of the theologians of the Church is certain. Nor is its certainty in the least impaired, if here or there some stray voice is raised in idle protest. For there will always be heresies; there will always be those to whom the wholesome pastures of sound doctrine will be distasteful and irksome.

To reject what Catholic theologians are agreed in teaching would be a piece of utter presumption. Not only are their opinions an index to the belief of the Church, but they by their teaching are largely instrumental in determining and maintaining the faith of the Church. It is by the careful and prolonged study of their works that the pastors themselves of Christ's flock are formed to sane learning, and duly equipped for the training and edification of the Faithful, and it is likewise to their teaching that recourse is had to settle the controversies which arise from time to time regarding various questions of faith and morals.

If, then, we interrogate the theologians of the Church with reference to the subject which we are now considering, that is to say, with reference to the Assumption of Mary into Heaven in body and soul, we find in their teaching a wonderful unanimity. This is especially true of the period dating from the proclamation of the dogma of the

Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854. But it is also true of the interval between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and that of the Vatican (1870). In both epochs there have been some hesitations, even some denials, chiefly on the part of men imbued with a Jansenistic or Modernistic spirit, but the great bulk of theologians of the two periods are concerned not so much with the reality of Our Lady's Assumption into Heaven, or with the fact of the universal belief of the Faithful in her glorious privilege, as with determining the theological censure to be attached to doctrinal statements denying it or calling it in question.

Pope Benedict XIV, in his work on the "Canonization of Saints," lays down the principle that

> if the Church, besides celebrating on August 15, and the following days the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven, proposes to the Faithful the homilies of St. John Damascene and St. Bernard, which in the clearest terms assert that she was taken up to Heaven in body as well as in soul, there can be no doubt, it seems, on which side lies the weight of her authority and her verdict.

Need we wonder, then, if our theologians in general denounce the contrary opinion as *rash,* and this not only at the present day, when some employ much more vigorous language to express their disapproval, but also from the time when the question first came to be discussed.

The great scholastic doctors of the Middle Ages—St. Thomas, Albertus Magnus, St. Bonaventure, etc.—seem

to have treated the Assumption of Our Lady as an undoubted truth, without discussing the degree of certainty with which it was held, nor the source from which the Church derived her knowledge of it. This period of peaceful possession was followed, however, by one of stress, wherein the upholders of the doctrine had to contend with opponents, who either denied it, or treated it as merely a pious opinion. It was the epoch when heresy was rampant throughout Europe, and the very foundations of faith seemed in danger of being wholly shattered. Nothing was sacred in the eyes of the innovators, and they who fought in defense of the truth were forced to scrutinize closely all the doctrines of the Church, in order to establish them on the surest and most evident basis.

Thus it was that, like other prerogatives of Mary, her glorious Assumption was carefully studied at the sources of Revelation until little by little out of divergence of views there emerged unanimity, and practically all Catholic theologians came to hold that the fact of the Assumption could no longer be called in question.

St. Peter Canisius, toward the middle of the sixteenth century, considered such as denied it to be imbued with an heretical bias, and the learned Cardinal De Lugo, nearly a century later, gave it as an example of temerity in matters of faith to say that the Blessed Virgin has not been taken up to Heaven in body and soul.

Similarly Suarez, of about the same date, and one of the great lights of Catholic theology, would have regarded

it in his day as the height of rashness to assail a doctrine so pious and so religious.

It is, however, especially since the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, and the convening of the Council of the Vatican in 1870, that the teaching of the theologians of the Church on the subject of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin has become more insistent and outspoken. We shall quote in support of this assertion the verdict of some of the more distinguished theologians of the present day or of a recent date. Thus Father Terrien, S.J., the author of a very able and learned treatise on Our Blessed Lady, writes as follows (*La Mère de Dieu,* Vol. II, p. 240):

> Let us say from the start that the Assumption, that is to say, the resurrection of Mary in advance and her triumphal entry into Heaven with her living and glorified flesh, if not yet a dogma of Faith, cannot be denied, or even called in question, without incurring at least the reproach of a decided and most blameworthy temerity.
>
> What gives it this degree of certitude is the unanimous agreement of theologians beginning with the birth of Scholasticism—an agreement that would be inexplicable, did it not reflect the teaching of the Church, and did it not result from it. It is the agreement if possible still more unanimous, of the Faithful all over the world. It is the authority of all Christian liturgies, which in the Feast of the "Passing," the "Sleep," and the Assumption of the Mother of God, celebrate not only her happy death, and the glorification of her blessed soul, but also the double privilege enjoyed by this most holy Virgin in her body: the privilege of escaping the corruption that is common to all, and the privilege of sharing without delay in the new birth, which is postponed for others to the end of time. It is lastly

the morally universal testimony of the Fathers and of ecclesiastical writers, who, from the sixth century to our day, have, so to say, vied with one another in celebrating this glorious mystery.

Nor is the Benedictine Abbot, Renaudin, less explicit or less emphatic. In his admirable monograph on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, he expresses himself in these terms (p. 14):

The doctrine, then, of the Assumption is absolutely certain, and, in the unanimous opinion of theologians, could not be denied without a grave fault of temerity. The proposition denying this privilege to Mary would deserve to be stigmatized, not as heretical, as has been done with exaggeration by two theologians, Catarino and Cordova, seeing that the Church does not sufficiently propose it as Divinely revealed, but as *rash,* according to Melchior Cano, De Lugo, Suarez, Serry, and Baronius; or as *erroneous,* according to John of Carthage, and Cardinal Gotti, who, with other theologians, holds anyone who denies the Assumption as *suspected of heresy.*

Still more uncompromising is the attitude of Cardinal Lépicier, former General of the Servites: "On more mature consideration," he says (*Tractatus de B. Maria V.*, p. 327), "it appears to me more advisable to conclude that the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin should be pronounced to be of *Faith,* as they say, *Catholico-Divine.*" That is, this truth on the one hand must be said to be contained in the deposit of Revelation, and hence is of *Divine* Faith; on the other, it has been sufficiently proposed through the ordinary teaching office of the Church, which has instituted in its honor a universal Feast, that is to say,

one which regards the whole world: hence it is of Faith *Catholico-Divine;* "though," as he adds, "it is not to be inferred from this that one who should deny this truth would incur the penalties launched against heretics, as there is lacking here an explicit definition of the Church."

Chapter XIV

The Argument from Prescription

IF apart from any explicit testimony of Holy Writ, we could clearly and unmistakably trace the belief of the Church in the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady back through the ages, in unbroken succession, even to the times of the Apostles themselves, we could have no possible doubt that it was Divinely revealed. For the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, abides with the Church forever, and it cannot be that under His guidance it should err, were it ever so little, in matters appertaining to faith or morals. Its pastors cannot teach what is erroneous, so long as their utterances are in harmony with those of the whole teaching body, nor can the Faithful believe what is false so long as they do not separate themselves from the great mass of true believers.

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that only when we can plainly and unmistakably display a chain of uninterrupted tradition in favor of a given doctrine, are we justified in regarding such a doctrine as part of the deposit of Divine Revelation. Were it question of deciding a mere matter of fact, the historical method might, indeed, be employed to advantage. Historical arguments may even be serviceable in determining the content of Apostolic

tradition, but the Church has other and surer means on which she can rely for reaching the same end. Christ dwelling in her, as He always does, ceases not to impart to her a mysterious and, so to say, instinctive perception of the truth, and the Church being the same in all ages, holds always the same doctrine, though not at all times with the same degree of explicitness. As has been aptly remarked, "If the Church did not say yesterday what she thinks today, she thought yesterday what she says today."

Hence, although we have endeavored in chapter XI to exhibit, with as much fulness as is practicable in a popular treatise, all the links in the chain of testimonies favoring the bodily Assumption of Our Blessed Lady into Heaven, it is not because we deem it essential to the establishment of the fact, as though without it we could not claim for Mary's Assumption the support of tradition, but because it is a gratifying thing to see how from age to age our brethren in the Faith have held concerning Mary's great privilege the same doctrine as ourselves.

There can be no misgiving on this head with respect to the centuries which have elapsed from the seventh or at least from the close of the tenth to the present day. And yet could it be shown conclusively that the Faithful have, with practical unanimity, believed firmly in the Assumption of our Blessed Lady as a part of Divine Revelation, even for a much shorter period, say, for instance, since the Council of the Vatican, or since that of Trent, this of itself would be an unanswerable argument to prove that the

fact of Mary's having been assumed into Heaven in advance of the general resurrection, is a truth Divinely revealed.

For if such is the faith of the Church at this day, it has always been so, at least implicitly, and hence is a part of the Apostolic tradition. It may be that we cannot point to an explicit assertion of the fact of the Assumption in the documents that have come down to us from the earliest antiquity. We may not be able to discover a formal statement of the great privilege accorded to Mary in the homilies of the Fathers or in other ecclesiastical writings of the first few centuries. But then besides her *written* tradition, the Church has also a *living* tradition, which, at least from the beginning, was not consigned to books or other documents, but was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, and which manifested no less the Church's teaching, and called no less for a whole-hearted assent, than that portion of the doctrine of the Apostles, which from the first was committed to writing.

It does not follow, then, that because, for this or for that point of belief, we cannot trace the links of the chain of Apostolic tradition back to the very inception of the Church, neither are we warranted in maintaining that it is part and parcel of the deposit of Divine Revelation. It is no more possible for the Church to err in what she believes today, than it has been at any period of her history, or than it was during the lifetime of the Apostles themselves. What she believes as Divinely revealed is abso-

lutely certain with the certainty of faith, and as there has been no new revelation addressed to the world since the death of the Apostles, what she believes today is comprised within the range of Apostolic tradition.

This or that doctrine now professed by the Church may not, it is true, have been taught formally and explicitly by the Apostles themselves; it may have been contained only implicitly in some other truth formulated by them in express and open terms. Thus, in the case before us, the Assumption into Heaven of the glorious Virgin Mary is not affirmed explicitly in the written word, and yet it may, without having been expressly enunciated by the Apostles in their oral teaching, have been implied with sufficient evidence in what they have handed down to us touching the exalted dignity of the Mother of God, and the altogether exceptional place which she holds in the great plan of our Redemption.

The argument in favor of the Assumption, which we have drawn from the universal assent of the Church throughout a limited period of time is known as the argument from *prescription*. It proceeds from an undeniable fact to the only satisfactory explanation that can be offered for it. The fact is the practical unanimity of the Church, both pastors and Faithful, in upholding the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption, and this throughout a period of at least five, or even ten, centuries. The only satisfactory explanation is that it is contained in what was handed down by the Apostles themselves—not as it would

seem, explicitly, but at least implicitly—and has always been regarded by the Church, from the time at which it began to be openly proposed, as part of the deposit of Faith.

Even from the earliest times, the heretics who sought to spread their pernicious doctrines, abused for that purpose the sacred writings, which they falsely interpreted, disdaining the voice of tradition. But Tertullian, so long a valiant champion of orthodoxy, refuted all their fallacies by appealing to the actual belief of the Church. "What the whole body of the Faithful thinks at present," so he argues, "it must always have thought. We are *in possession* of this or that truth: for us *prescription* holds, and you are disturbers of the peace and of the public order."

The term *prescription* is borrowed from the civil law, and is applied by Tertullian to disputes in matters of religion by reason of a certain analogy to questions involving ownership of property or other material rights. In order to lessen the evils consequent upon lawsuits and wrangling among citizens, the law provides that peaceful possession of an estate, or the undisputed exercise of a right with reference to it, continued for a term of years differing in different countries, shall constitute a valid claim to the property or exercise of which there is question. So, in like manner, in matters of faith, where a doctrine has been accepted by the Church as Divinely revealed, and no voice has ever been raised to proclaim it false or doubtful,

such a doctrine must be considered as belonging to the deposit of Faith, and guaranteed by Apostolic tradition.

Nor could anything be more reasonable than this inference. For universal assent to a doctrine on the part of the Church is inconceivable, unless it be proposed by an authority to which all the Faithful bow, that is to say, by the authority of the Apostles whom Christ Himself commissioned to teach all nations. Nor is it possible, having in view the promise made by Our Lord to be ever with His Church, that she, at any period of her existence, should accept as true what is false, or as Divinely revealed what has not been revealed.

Applying now these principles to the belief in Our Lady's Assumption, which has existed throughout the Church for so many centuries, there can be no doubt that it belongs to the deposit of Faith. So certainly thought the Bishops, to the number of more than two hundred, who at the Council of the Vatican pleaded for its formal definition. For they would not have deemed it capable of this, were they not convinced that it had been Divinely revealed. So, too, the theologians of modern times, who favor its definition, and severely stigmatize the opposite opinion, show clearly that they regard the Assumption as a truth of Revelation and as such comprised in the deposit of Faith.

So, finally, the simple Faithful who, with such unanimity, hold fast to the doctrine of the Assumption, do so because they are persuaded that it has been Divinely re-

vealed. It is question here of a fact, but of one quite different in kind from, say, the Resurrection of Christ, of which we have the historical record preserved, in Scripture and tradition. For the Assumption of Our Lady, as for the Immaculate Conception, there are no witnesses. If through a long period of years the Faithful have given their assent to the former, as to a certain truth, it is only because they believe that God has been pleased to reveal it to His Church, there being no other way in which the Church could have arrived at a state of certainty with regard to it.

Now what the Faithful for a considerable time have believed to have been Divinely revealed, must necessarily have been so revealed. Such a doctrine belongs to the deposit of Faith, and cannot be otherwise than true. For Christ cannot permit His Church to err by holding falsehood for truth. Hence the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, implying her complete glorification, is Divinely revealed and part of the deposit of Faith.

Chapter XV

The Assumption and Holy Writ

WE have seen that the Assumption of Our Lady, though not yet a dogma of Faith, cannot, however, be denied or called in question without a sin of grave temerity. Theologians have been at one in asserting it ever since the beginning of the scholastic era, and although theologians are not the Church, yet it is through them, at least in part, that the Church exercises her ordinary teaching office. To reject what they concur in asserting would be an act of rash presumption.

But there are one or two points with reference to the Assumption where theologians are not in full accord. There is some diversity of view as to the censure of which the opposite opinion is deserving, and there is also some hesitation in assigning the source from which the Church derives her certain knowledge of the mystery. If the Assumption of our Blessed Lady is, in the mind of the Church, a certain and undoubted truth, she must have come by her certainty through no merely natural process, but as the result of Divine Revelation. It is not for her a simple historical fact, attested like other data of history by the depositions of witnesses, nor is it a mere logical deduction from other truths of reason, but it is an integral part of the deposit of Faith, committed to the keeping of

the Apostles and to their successors by the Divine Founder of the Church or by His Holy Spirit.

It is not requisite for this end that the Assumption of Our Lady should be contained explicitly in the sources of Revelation. It is enough if it is found there implicitly, whether in the text of Holy Scripture, or in the notion itself of Mary, as one set apart from the mass of mankind, sharing in an exceptional way in the fruits of the Redemption, and in the victory of her Son over Satan, and closely associated with Him as the new Eve with the new Adam—a notion which, as being everywhere prevalent from the earliest times, must have had its origin in the teaching of the Apostles themselves.

Minor Texts

The passages of Scripture which are put forward by theologians as implying the doctrine of the Assumption are of two classes. First, there are those which may be accommodated to the mystery in such a way as to fit it wonderfully well, but which the majority of critics consider as in no way applying to the Assumption of Our Lady, whether we take them in the literal or in the mystic sense. In other words they simply were not spoken of the Assumption. The saints and others who have understood them as referring to it have found in the application a certain unction and holy relish, which the inspired word is wont to bring with it, and which helps to a devout appreci-

ation of the mystery in question, but the sacred writer had no such thought in mind. So the generality of critics.

To this category of texts belongs the eighth verse of Psalm cxxxi: "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place: thou and the Ark which thou hast sanctified." The words of the text refer literally to the Ark of the Covenant, and were intended to be sung on the occasion of its solemn transfer from its temporary resting place in the Tabernacle to the permanent home prepared for it in the Holy of Holies of the Temple built by Solomon. The invitation is at once to the Lord, and to the Ark of the Testament, from which, above the mercy seat, He was wont to guide His people.

But the Ark is a type of our Blessed Lady, and saints of both the Greek and the Latin Churches may be quoted from the earliest times, who have in their homilies applied this text to Mary's glorious Assumption. Did they wish their hearers to infer that Our Lady's great privilege was actually expressed in it or at least foreshadowed? There is little or no evidence that they did. Their language is quite consistent with mere Scriptural accommodation.

So may we say of the tenth verse of Psalm xliv, which is a beautiful bridal song celebrating the marriage of the Heavenly Spouse with His Church. The words in question are those in which the latter is represented as a *Queen standing at the right hand* of her Spouse, arrayed in gilded vesture, and decked out with a rich variety of ornament. The Church is here primarily intended, yet the Church is

made up of saints, and in Mary alone the praises attributed to her are from the first perfectly realized. This suffices for understanding the strikingly beautiful image as referring to Mary, and we lack serious grounds for asserting that the Fathers, in so applying the text, had in mind anything beyond mere accommodation.

A similar verdict might be passed on a number of texts drawn from the Canticle of Canticles, that inspired song, which is all concerned with the mutual love of the Heavenly Spouse and His Bride. In the discourses of the Fathers of the Church they are used to exalt our Blessed Lady, to whom they are so strictly applicable. She, like the Church, of which they are primarily written, is all fair even from the first. She alone of all the elect ascends ever upward without delay or interruption of any kind. By reason of her nearness to the Sun of Justice, she, more than all the other saints, shines resplendent with light, even as the morning rising.

Still more to our purpose are those texts which seem to bear directly upon Our Lady's Assumption, of which there are not a few. Such are the invitations addressed by the Spouse to His Beloved to come to Him in haste. He says (Cant. ii, 10-14):

> Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come, the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree has put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my

love, my beautiful one, and come. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely.

And there are still other passages that are even more pointed in their adaptation to the mystery of the Assumption, as, for instance, the following: "Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?" (Cant. iii, 6.) Or again: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (Cant. vi, 9.) Or still more: "Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved?" (Cant. viii, 5.)

However, we must not look for a mystical sense in Holy Scripture where we have not sufficient warrant for doing so. The wonderful adaptability of certain passages to Mary and her glorious privilege cannot, of itself, be regarded as undoubted proof that they were spoken of her. Neither can the fact that the Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers constantly refer them to Mary, or that the Church herself does so in her liturgy. It would be imperative that such texts in the sense thus attributed to them should be plainly intended not merely to arouse within us pious and befitting emotions, but also and chiefly to express to us a truth comprised within the range of Apostolic tradition. Can we affirm such a purpose on the part of the Fathers and other writers, or of those responsible for

the liturgy of the Church, in the case of the minor texts, which we are discussing? It is to be feared that the weight of the authority of theologians is on the negative side.

Major Texts

The passages of Holy Scripture, which are more confidently adduced as containing implicitly the doctrine of Mary's bodily Assumption into Heaven, are the Proto-Evangel, or Primitive Gospel, as it is called, which is found in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, verse 15, and the Angel's salutation addressed to Mary, and recorded by St. Luke in the first chapter of his Gospel, verse the twenty-eighth.

It is not intended that either text considered by itself, enunciates the mystery in question so openly and unmistakably as to leave no room for reasonable doubt. But great light has been shed upon these passages of Scripture by the authoritative interpretation given to them in the Bull, *Ineffabilis,* proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. There the Sovereign Pontiff teaches us to discover in the inspired word a depth of meaning, which were it not for the encouragement of his example might appear to us exaggerated and without solid foundation.

I

"I will put enmities between thee and the Woman."

In the Papal document here referred to there is ques-

tion only of the Immaculate Conception, but the same process of immediate deduction may be applied to the text in such a way as to infer from it no less Our Lady's glorious Assumption. For if the inspired language of the Proto-Evangel: "I will put enmities between thee and the Woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head," is to be understood as implying an active, perpetual and victorious enmity on the part of the Woman towards the serpent, and hence her absolute exemption from our nature's primeval taint, the meaning may be still further pressed so as to include her complete victory over Satan, together with entire immunity from the consequences of sin. Of these the most humiliating, undoubtedly, is the hideous deformity of the body which follows quickly the departure of the soul, and its gradual reduction into dust, from which it will not rise until the voice of the trumpet summoning all men to judgment on the Last Day.

As for death itself, there could be and there are weighty reasons why Mary should not be exempted from it, though in her case it was in no way a punishment for sin, any more than it was in that of her Divine Son. To be sure Jesus died for the sins of mankind, and Mary, as most closely associated with Him in the work of the Redemption, sharing directly in that whole mystery of expiation, in order that, as Pius X expressed it (*Ad diem illum*), "she might merit our Redemption *de congruo*, as Jesus merited it *de condigno*"—Mary too, I say, died for us, that she might in

all respects, be most nearly assimilated to the Saviour of the world. She was, indeed, to be the second Eve to the second Adam.

Death, followed by a speedy resurrection, as in the case of Mary and her Son, was not a defeat, but a triumph. Mary accepted death in order to conquer it, as Jesus had previously done. On the contrary it would have been sheer humiliation for her had her sacred body been allowed to lie indefinitely in the prison of the tomb. It would in no way have added to her merit, but would simply have furnished Satan with a valid boast. For would it not have been a veritable triumph for him, had he succeeded, murderer that he is, in holding her fast in the shackles of death, whereas she had been announced from the beginning as in all opposed to him, and his conqueror through and with her Son?

It would seem, then, that the Proto-Evangel does, indeed, contain implicitly the doctrine of the Assumption. We do not affirm this with the same assurance as in the case of the Immaculate Conception, where we have the voice of the Church authoritatively interpreting for us the momentous prophecy. But although the Vicar of Christ does not go on to apply its content in such a way as to include still other privileges of the Woman, they seem, nevertheless, to be plainly involved in *the complete and glorious victory, the triumph in the fullest sense,* which he sees intended in the impressive words of Holy Writ, which we have just been considering.

II

"Hail full of grace . . . blessed art thou among women."

It might on first thought appear preposterous to seek to deduce the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin from the fulness of grace attributed to her by the Angel Gabriel, nor is that precisely what we attempt to do. The fact of the Assumption, like other facts of the supernatural order, must be known through Divine Revelation, and we do but venture to point to a text of Holy Writ in which the Revelation appears to be contained. If we can show that Mary's fulness of grace may properly comprise, in addition to other gifts, her immunity from corruption in the grave, and her complete glorification in advance of the general resurrection, we shall have given to the question—Is the Assumption revealed in Holy Scripture?—at least a partial and plausible answer.

Now the word *grace* may be understood either in the strict sense, in which it is used to signify a supernatural gift of God, having for its immediate effect the sanctification of the soul considered in its substance or in its higher faculties; or it may be taken in a broader sense, to designate other gifts related to the first, and serving to harmonize, adorn and perfect man's nature as a whole.

If, then, we urge to the full the meaning of the salutation of the Angel, taking the word *grace* in its broader signification, we shall find that the *fulness of grace* attributed to Mary does, indeed, comprise her resurrection in

advance and her glorious Assumption, not as though she had already risen from the dead, and had already been assumed into Heaven, but in the sense that her incomparable sanctity warrants us in ascribing to her all the gifts of Heavenly grace befitting her at any and every period of her exceptional career.

St. Thomas (III, qu.27) attributes to Mary's sanctification, which is the effect of grace in the strictest sense, her preservation from venial sin. But the inclination to sin, and the impossibility of not sinning at least venially, come from the disorder of our passions, which is commonly termed concupiscence, and which appertains to the sensible appetite, and hence to the body or lower nature. It is evident, then, that grace may have to a greater or less extent its counterpart in the flesh, and we may well infer that where grace is so abundant as to quite extinguish the flame of concupiscence, it may also preserve the flesh from corruption, and destine it to a speedy glorification.

In another place, St. Thomas, commenting on the "Hail Mary," says that the grace bestowed on the Blessed Virgin surpassed that of the saints: first, with reference to the soul, in which she had the whole fulness of gifts; and secondly, with reference to the body, in as much as grace flowed over from the soul upon the flesh. For others it was much to have the soul sanctified through grace, but Mary's soul was so full of grace, that from it grace was poured out upon the body, with a view to her conceiving the Son of God.

Here we have the Angelic Doctor using the term grace of the gifts bestowed upon the virginal flesh of Mary, for the purpose of making her a worthy Mother of God. Hence the fulness of grace would include all other gifts conferred upon her out of consideration for her high dignity and to give due honor to her exceptional redemption. Among these unquestionably would be her resurrection from the dead, in anticipation of the general resurrection, and her glorious Assumption.

But we have explicit testimony to the content of the words, *full of grace,* in a letter addressed in the year 1150 by the Pope himself, Alexander III, to the Sultan of Iconium which we have already quoted, and in which, at the latter's request, he exposes to him the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Speaking of the greatness of the Mother of God, he has these remarkable words: "Mary conceived without detriment to her virginal modesty, brought forth her Son without pain, passed hence without decay, according to the word of the Angel, or rather of God speaking by the Angel, that she might be shown to be *full,* not *half full,* of grace." In other words Mary's fulness of grace includes her exemption from decay. But if that is true, then it implies with equal evidence her immediate glorification.

Blessed art thou among women.

From these words, we may draw a separate inference with regard to Mary's glorious Assumption. For the

extraordinary *blessing* which has come to us through the *second Eve,* must entirely offset the curse which was brought upon us by the first. *Blessed among women,* that is, blessed beyond all other women, she must free us from the curse that has fallen upon us through the disobedience of Eve. Doomed as a punishment for sin, to return sooner or later into the dust from which we have been taken, we shall rise again on the last day, and shall be clothed again with our flesh, no longer mortal, but glorified. For us, this will be only after our bodies have mouldered in the grave for years, ay, for centuries. But Mary, in virtue of her singular blessedness, was not suffered to see corruption. Like her Divine Son, after yielding to death for a brief space, in order to triumph over it, she arose from the tomb to a glorious immortality. Her complete victory will be when through her Son death shall be cast down headlong, and her children shall be delivered for ever from the power of him who had the empire of death.

Chapter XVI

The Argument from Reason

PROPERLY speaking there can be no argument or proof for the Assumption from pure reason. Mere history by itself and apart from Catholic tradition affords no secure basis for affirming the doctrine with certainty. It is, as we hold, and have endeavored to show, the teaching of the Church, and the universal belief of the Faithful, a truth of Faith, though not as yet positively defined and a part of the deposit of Divine Revelation.

This sort of knowledge, however, where we accept a doctrine on the authority of those from whom we have received it, does not fully satisfy the mind, unless we perceive at the same time the intrinsic reasons why it should be as we have been taught. Hence we examine the matter and study it from every point of view, not as though doubting the truth in question, but following the natural bent of the human mind, which seeks to know things in themselves. That is what is meant by *fides quaerens intellectum,* "faith seeking understanding."

When, then, in the following chapters we propose various considerations as going to show, some with greater, some with less force, that it cannot be but that Mary was preserved from the corruption of the grave, and gloriously assumed into Heaven, we are not suggesting arguments

why the Assumption must be believed as a truth of Faith—the one motive for an act of faith is Divine Revelation—but we are striving to point out the reasons of high fitness which impel us to attribute this privilege to Mary; reasons which with varying degrees of evidence, render the truth of the Assumption not only highly probable, but even in the strict sense certain.

The process of reasoning which we shall follow is based upon what is called the *analogy of faith.* This implies a certain correspondence between the truths of Revelation, which links them together, and furnishes a motive for admitting one when once another has been accepted. It may consist in a certain resemblance which is found to exist between them, a relation of parts to the whole in which they are contained, of dependence, or any other rational connection.

The argument from analogy does not usually lead to certain and quite evident conclusions. For it does not follow that because a thing presents to the mind a certain fitness or congruity, the opposite must be unbefitting or incongruous. And yet certainty can be had only in as much as all doubt is excluded, and hence in as much as the opposite conclusion is shown to be impossible.

A thing, however, which is not impossible in itself, or when considered absolutely, may yet be altogether repugnant in the present order of Divine Providence. For once God, with absolute freedom, has determined upon the plan of creation which it is His purpose to realize, it

is impossible for Him to deviate from it in any detail, or to allow it to be interfered with by any created agency. He need not have made the world, but having done so, He cannot but be true to Himself—He cannot contradict Himself, He cannot act inconsistently with His wisdom or other attributes.

It is thus possible for us to argue with certainty from a truth or body of truths, which God is known to have revealed, to others which are only implied, in as much as a denial of the latter would involve a want of order or consistency in the Divine plan. Only we must remark that, according to grave theologians, a conclusion drawn from premises one of which has not been Divinely revealed, cannot be the object of a strictly dogmatic definition. In other words, however certain the deduction, the conclusion may not be proposed by the Church as matter of Divine Faith. It is not part of the deposit of supernatural Revelation.

Others, however, distinguish between the conclusion of a process of reasoning properly so called, and an immediate inference, whereby a universal principle is applied to a particular case, or the content of some general assertion, on being subjected to a close scrutiny and analysis, is found to include more than at first sight was apparent, or in fine, the full sense of a truth already known and believed is exposed with a view to a more complete and thorough understanding.

In the following chapters, then, we shall argue from the

various prerogatives of Mary to her crowning glory, which is her Assumption into Heaven, in body as well as in soul. In other words, we shall reason from God's dealings with His Blessed Mother, as manifestly revealed to us in her other mysteries, to her final glorification, without which there would be an inconsistency on the part of the Creator, a certain incoherence and lack of unity in His work.

We might with Benedict XIV reduce the theological reasons in favor of the Assumption to five heads—as was done by certain Bishops of the Vatican Council to the number of two hundred, in the *Postulatum* which they presented to the assembled Fathers, asking for its formal definition, but which we may well believe, the misfortune of the times, necessitating the adjournment of the Council, prevented from being favorably acted upon.

These heads or reasons were: (1) the dignity of the Divine Motherhood; (2) Mary's spotless virginity; (3) her surpassing sanctity; (4) her intimate union with her Divine Son; (5) Our Lord's deep and tender love for His Blessed Mother.

While omitting none of these, Father Mattiussi, of whose admirable treatise on the Assumption we have gladly and often availed ourselves, has added other more detailed considerations, such as the consecration of Mary's virginal flesh by the mystery of the Incarnation, her exceptional redemption, and her plentitude of grace.

Others again have chosen to consider Mary—first in herself: her Divine Maternity, her Immaculate Concep-

tion, her virginity and fulness of grace. Secondly, in her relation to us as the new Eve, and our Coredemptrix; as our Mother and Mediatrix and the universal Queen. Thirdly, and lastly, as an object of love and homage, on the part of God Himself, of Jesus and ourselves. From all and each of these considerations the Assumption of Our Lady would appear to follow as an obvious deduction. Without exactly adhering to any of these classifications, the writer will be mainly guided by them in the selection and arrangement of his proofs. These, we trust, will be found to be really convincing, at least when taken not in the abstract, but in the light of God's special providence toward Mary in the order which He has actually established.

Chapter XVII

The Divine Maternity

Chief Argument for the Assumption

1. The Dignity

IT is from Mary's incomparable dignity as Mother of God that the Fathers and Doctors of the Church chiefly argue, when in their discourses to the Faithful on her Feast-days they proclaim her resurrection from the tomb and glorious Assumption into Heaven. And in fact we all readily feel what an utter lack of harmony there would be between the beginning and the conclusion of God's work upon that masterpiece of His wisdom and His might, if Mary's hallowed remains had been allowed to moulder in the grave, like those of ordinary mortals, instead of being promptly brought to life again and made to share in the glory of her beatified soul.

We do not mean to imply that the Maternity of Mary would be sufficient of itself to assure us of the truth of her Assumption, as if the two ideas were necessarily connected, but only that considering the actual order established by God in the government of the world, He would deviate from His plan, and would betray an impossible inconsistency in His conduct, were He not to crown the Divine

Motherhood with proportionate glory, as soon as was compatible with the part assigned to her in the work of man's redemption. Here again, however, the word *proportionate* must be understood, not as though we could determine *a priori* the degree of glory that would correspond with the Divine Maternity, but in as much as we know from Scripture and tradition the preeminence God has assigned to Mary in contrast even with the most favored of the Blessed.

It is a law of Divine Providence that God lavishes the riches of His graces and gifts in proportion to the supernatural dignity of those on whom they are bestowed. In other words, it is in the measure of their union with God that He pours forth upon them the abundance of Heavenly favors. Thus we see that to the sacred Humanity of Christ, substantially united with the Divine Word, God has imparted the fulness of all grace, but to the saints, whose union with God, however great, is only moral and accidental, He has given but a share in His gifts according to the degree in which they have been united with Him.

But what shall we say of Mary, whose union with her Son is close upon the physical and substantial order? Surely, in her case, too, only the fulness of the Divine gifts would be in keeping with her unexampled dignity: *in Mariam vero totius gratiae, quae in Christo est, plentitudo venit, quamquam aliter*—words attributed to St. Jerome, but expressing the sentiment of the Church in all ages.

The manner in which the fulness is bestowed upon

Mary and upon her Divine Son differs, to be sure, but there is in her case a like plenitude of all created gifts. For Mary too is *full of grace,* and in the gift to her of Jesus, with all that this gift implies, *all others* are included. In comparison with it, all the rest fades into insignificance. By itself alone it raises Mary to a dignity which is in a true sense infinite.

Now it is impossible that the conclusion of God's work should belie its inception. His gifts are without repentance, nor may we look for any alteration of His plan. If, then, there is any grace or favor which can be bestowed upon Mary, without its clashing with the role assigned to her in the plan of the Redemption, we can say for certain that it has not been denied to her. For such is the traditional interpretation of the *fulness of grace* ascribed to Mary.

But as Jesus died for our salvation, and on the third day rose again, so Mary in union with Him must die, and after a brief sojourn in the tomb, must rise with Jesus to a new and glorified life. Anything further than this, as though Mary were herself liable to the consequences of sin, is quite inadmissible. In the case of Mary, as in that of her Divine Son, suffering and death are not the effect of a penal law affecting our whole race, but the result of the Divine will associating Mary with Jesus in the expiatory work of saving souls. Whatever there is of atoning power in death and suffering, is all to the purpose, and it is God's redeeming love for man that requires of Jesus

and Mary to accept what for others is the punishment of sin. But in the corruption of the grave, as well as in the sojourn there throughout the ages, there is nothing in the nature of merit, nothing but what is utterly humiliating and degrading.

As, then, it is impossible to think of Mary remaining in the tomb after death, save for a very brief space, we can but conceive of her as quickly raised from the dead and admitted to that supreme beatitude, which was only delayed for a moment, that by yielding to death, in concert with her Son, she might vanquish it, and so fulfil the part she was to play in the great drama of the Redemption.

2. Caro Christi Caro Mariae

It is St. Augustine who has given us the phrase: "The flesh of Christ is the flesh of Mary." In a certain sense we may say with a pious author, that "the seal of the Divine Motherhood is impressed upon the body rather than upon the soul of Mary." Through that Divine Maternity the most pure body of Our Lady receives a special consecration. Everything that is set apart from common use and especially referred to God, is thereby rendered sacred and more particularly so when it is brought in a manner into contact with the Divinity. How wonderfully sacred, then, is the flesh of her who gave of her own substance, that from it might be formed the flesh of the Incarnate Son of God! What comparison can there be between that

virginal flesh, and the Ark of the Covenant, which, merely from its purpose of shadowing forth the presence of the All-holy One, was deemed a thing so sacred, that it must needs be fashioned of *incorruptible* wood? What are our churches, our altars, our tabernacles, our sacred vessels when compared with Mary? They are sanctified by indirect contact with the real presence of Christ, but Mary's virginal body was for a long time in substantial and direct contact with the Word of God made flesh.

The bodies of the Blessed in Heaven will be glorified by union with their souls beatified in God, and already here on earth, through a contact with Christ in the Eucharist, which is merely indirect, our bodies receive a special title to a glorious resurrection. How much more glorious and speedy a resurrection then is due to the incomparable Mother whose union with her Incarnate Son was far more intimate, and which endured not for a few passing moments only, but for those long months which He spent in her chaste bosom in such immediate and vital intimacy, when the life of Mother and that of the Son were as a single life!

There is, then, no such thing as decay for Mary's hallowed flesh, consigned though it be to the earth for a brief space, that the Mother may bear a closer resemblance to her Divine Son. Death shall not establish his empire over her. Rottenness shall have no part in her: her sacred remains shall not be the food of worms. For God who has been pleased to exalt and consecrate her virginal body, by

the mystery of the Incarnation, has not altered His mind so as to let it fall a prey to the unspeakable horrors and degradation of the grave.

3. Jesus' Love for Mary

There is, moreover, the love of Jesus for His Blessed Mother which stands in the way of such desecration. Assuredly He cannot fall short in the discharge of a duty which is imposed by the Divine law on all children as such, the duty of loving her who gave them birth. Jesus loves His Mother because she is His Mother, and has been endowed by Him with an abundance of those gifts and graces which made her worthy of her high dignity and a fit object of His love.

But there is yet another motive why He loves her. He does so because of the fidelity with which she suffered with Him in all the humiliations and torments endured by Him for our salvation. There was not one among them all that had not its echo in Mary's heart. And why? By reason of Mary's immense love for Jesus. Her compassion, which was at once deep and tender, had its source in her transcendent love. She suffered more from the envy and the hatred that His enemies bore to Jesus, and from all the evil that they did to Him, than any other, because she loved Him more. Her love for Jesus transfixed her soul on Calvary, and made her Mother of Sorrows and Queen of Martyrs.

Here, in the proof of love that Mary gave to Jesus, by entering so intimately into all His sufferings, is a supreme motive why Jesus should bear towards her a very deep and very exceptional love. Nor can we believe that owing, as He did, His own glorious Ascension into Heaven to the sufferings and humiliations which He had endured in His capacity of Saviour of the world, He would have failed to bestow upon Mary a like recompense for her compassion by assuming her into Heaven not only in soul but also in body.

4. Parallelism of Mysteries

There is a further fitness in the Assumption of Our Lady, when viewed in its relation to the other mysteries of her life, all of which depend ultimately upon the Divine Maternity. Between the mysteries that have to do with events in Mary's life, and those which concern her Divine Son, there is a perfect parallelism. From the very start, predestination of the Son according to His human nature involves that of Mary to become His Mother. The Incarnation implies the Divine Maternity; for if Mary's Son is the Man-God, then Mary is the Mother of God. The infancy of the Divine Babe in all its phases presents to us the Child with Mary, His Mother, and throughout the hidden life, they are similarly associated. Nor is it otherwise at the solemn hour of His Passion and Death on Calvary. He will have Mary at His side, sharing with Him by a most tender and lively compassion, all His cruel tor-

ments, and drinking with Him the cup of bitterness whereby He is to save the world.

A pious French writer of the last century, borrowing the simile from Father Paul Segneri, compares Mary to the cloud whereon the sun, by the reflection of its rays, produces an image of itself of striking brightness, forming about itself another sun by the luminous phenomenon known as parhelion.

So for every mystery, every prerogative, every glorious attribute of Christ, there is a corresponding mystery, prerogative and glory of Mary. It is a fact [says the writer whom we are quoting] and a fact so certain as to suppose an economy or law. How, then, could one ask that the mystery of the *Ascension* should be the only mystery of Christ without its *parhelion,* consisting of a corresponding mystery in Mary? How is it possible for two destinies so wonderfully united from the start and throughout their course, to come to be separated at their term?

5. The Empty Tomb

We have finally another argument, founded on the dignity of the Divine Motherhood, which would seem to prove convincingly the Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven in body and soul. The tomb of the Mother of God, has been pointed out for centuries, at Jerusalem, and at Ephesus, but no Christian people have ever claimed to have actually with them her hallowed remains. If, then, her sacred body has not been revivified and carried up to Heaven, Our Lord has done less to glorify His Mother

than to do honor to many of His saints. For while in many instances He has even wrought miracles to preserve the latter for the veneration of the Faithful, he would have suffered the remains of His Blessed Mother to lie somewhere on earth in utter oblivion, after having first permitted them to experience all the horrors of the grave, and finally to be reduced to a handful of ashes.

But, as that is repugnant to every Christian sentiment, it can only be that Jesus' love for Mary has provided for her in a way truly worthy of Him, and at the same time proportionate to her dignity as Mother of God. Her sacred body, so marvelously consecrated by the Divine Maternity, has been honored not by being left to the Church as an object of universal reverence here on earth, but by being assumed to indescribable glory in Heaven, and to a throne at the right hand of her Divine Son.

Chapter XVIII

The Immaculate Conception And the Assumption

IT is since the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Pope Pius IX, in 1854, that practically every voice in opposition to her bodily Assumption into Heaven has been hushed, and that this doctrine so glorious to Mary, after a brief period of strife, has come once more into peaceful possession in the Church of her Son. That is doubtless due to the fact that the Immaculate Conception, whether considered in itself, or in the praises of Mary as set forth in the Papal document proclaiming it, puts Our Lady in a place quite apart, where everything concerning her is to be determined by a standard altogether different from that which must be applied to others.

For if from the first moment of her Conception Mary is fair and stainless and exempt from the original curse, then the otherwise universal law of sin admits in her case of a glorious exception. It is a law that holds good for all others, but not for her who, as the new Eve, is destined to cooperate with the new Adam in the Redemption of the human race. She has been redeemed in a *sublimer* way, and stands forth from the first adorned with a grace and sanctity far in excess of what has been bestowed on all

other creatures, even the highest of the Angels—a grace and sanctity so stupendous as to surpass the comprehension of any created intellect, no greater being conceivable under God.

With the mind of the Church thus clearly revealed, it is no wonder that theologians ceased to hesitate, and were fain to draw the consequences which followed from the recognition of Mary's exceptional position in the economy of the Redemption. There could henceforth be no logical ground for withholding from Mary any grace or favor, however extraordinary it might seem, provided only it did not conflict with the role she was to fill in the great drama of the salvation of souls. The proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception shed a wondrous light upon the whole theology of Mary, and what the simple Faithful had all along believed through that infallible instinct which the Holy Spirit impressed upon their hearts, the learned now fearlessly proclaimed, adding the force of evident reasoning to the constant tradition of the Church.

There were motives why Mary should die: in this, too, she must be associated with her Divine Son, who submitted to death for the redemption of mankind. But there is no good reason why she should incur the degradation of the grave, with the horrors of dissolution, whereby the body which was taken from the earth, returns gradually into dust. Likeness to her Son forbids it: for of Him it is written, "Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption," and Christ, though He died and was buried,

rose again from the tomb in triumph on the third day.

Nor does it harmonize with the Immaculate Conception. For in the actual order of Providence, the one thing that has brought death into the world, with the attendant revolting corruption of the flesh, is sin. It is because all have sinned, that death has passed to all mankind. But Mary, by her unique privilege, was exempt from sin, and hence from all its evil consequences. She came in no way under the curse that fell upon the sinner; the Divine malediction did not extend to her. If notwithstanding this she died, so did her Divine Son, and for an analogous reason. His death had for its purpose to expiate the sins of mankind, and Mary, in the words of Pope Pius X, "must merit our redemption *de congruo*" (by a certain congruity), as Christ merited it *de condigno* (as a matter of justice). In the present order of things, the separation of soul and body is, indeed, the penalty of sin, but it is not the whole penalty. There is a more hideous aspect consisting in the decay or corruption of the body, and its imprisonment throughout weary ages in the tomb. When God reproved Adam for his crime of disobedience, His words were in part as follows (Gen. iii, 17-19):

> Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. . . In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.

From this curse Mary, in virtue of her Immaculate Conception, was absolutely exempt. Free, as she was, from the smallest stain of sin, she could in no way be liable to its consequences. She bore the hardships of life and the pangs of death, not only that in these she might resemble her Divine Son, but also that she might be to us, her children, a model and a comforter in the trials of life and the sorrows of death. But it could have served no worthy purpose to subject Mary to the revolting process of bodily dissolution, and such a humiliation coming after the ineffable consecration and exaltation of her virginal flesh in the mystery of the Incarnation, would have betrayed an impossible inconsistency on the part of Almighty God, whose works are without repentance, and who does not fail to finish whatever work He has once begun, provided only His creatures set no obstacle in the way.

But as Mary was preserved from corruption after death, so she was also speedily glorified. The immediate glorification of the body at the term of the period of probation here, would have been the common lot of all, had not sin intervened; it was, therefore, undoubtedly the lot of her in whom sin had had no part. And this we may affirm with the greater certainty because of the traditional sentiment of the Faithful, ascribing to Mary all the gifts and graces not out of keeping with her role as Cooperatrix in the work of our salvation. Once Mary has played her part to the full, being assimilated to our Divine Redeemer even to the point of sacrificing her life as He had done,

there is no longer any reason why her resurrection from the dead and glorious Assumption should be further delayed. The only fit dwelling place for a body so singularly exalted is Heaven.

It is possible that there may be other saints, whose bodies have been raised from the dead in advance of the general resurrection, and who are already fully glorified. This is the opinion of not a few theologians with reference to those of whom the Evangelist, Saint Matthew, tells us, that at the death of Christ, "many bodies of the saints who had slept, arose, and coming out of the tombs after His Resurrection came into the Holy City and appeared to many." If it is true that they were glorified together with Christ, it is an additional argument for conceding as much and far more to the Mother of Our Lord, with this distinction, that in the case of the saints such a glorification, supposing it to have taken place, had for its all-sufficient motive the infinite liberality of Almighty God, who dispenses His favors as He wills, whereas in the case of Mary, the wonders already wrought in her demanded her bodily Assumption as their necessary complement, without which the end of God's work would not have tallied with its inception.

Of these wonders the first in order of time is the Immaculate Conception, but it is by no means the only one. Mary's whole existence is a tissue of extraordinary privileges. How, then, could Almighty God, after showing infinite concern for everything affecting Mary—infinite rev-

erence, we may say, for Mary's virginal body—how could He in the end display so strange an indifference to its fate, as to allow it to moulder in the grave, like the body of any ordinary woman? We may be sure that He did nothing of the kind, but that, just as Jesus' perfect triumph came at the very moment when His descent into the grave seemed to signalize the complete victory of His enemies, so Mary's glorious resurrection, following close upon her death, announced the utter defeat of Satan, and sealed the triumph of the Woman, whose virginal foot is henceforth on his head.

Chapter XIX

Mary's Spotless Virginity And the Assumption

IT has often been observed, and most pertinently, that Mary's immunity from the corruption of the grave, was but the continuation and perfection of her absolute virginal integrity. What is here most wonderful, and what has ever elicited in the highest degree the admiration of mankind, is the combination in one singularly favored individual of the joy of motherhood with the glory of virginity.

Here she stands absolutely *alone,* rather than *first* amid a throng of others more or less closely resembling her. This, as St. Bernard says, is her unique privilege: it shall not be given to another: *Gaudia Matris habens cum virginitatis honore, nec primam similem visa est nec habere sequentem.*

First a virgin in mind, by her unshaken and unconditional resolve to maintain her virginity forever intact, agreeably to the words addressed by her to the Angel: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" She first conceived the Son of God in her heart, before conceiving Him in her chaste bosom.

And this latter she did without any loss or sacrifice of her virginal integrity. It was by the power of the Most

High and the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost that the Divine Word became incarnate in her womb. And to this the saints have seen a manifest allusion in the gate that was shown to the Prophet Ezechiel (xliv, 1, 2) and which looked toward the east from the outer sanctuary, and was to remain forever shut.

Similarly in the burning bush, which glowed and burned without being consumed—the great vision, of which Moses was so desirous to know the secret—Holy Church has ever beheld a type of the glorious virginity of Mary.

So, too, in the Ark of the Covenant, in which were kept the Tables of the Law, a morsel of the Manna with which God fed His people in the desert, and the Rod of Aaron that bloomed in token of God's choice of him for the priesthood, there is manifestly a figure of our Blessed Lady who merited to harbor within her breast our Divine Saviour, the Author of the Law, the true Bread from Heaven, and the one eternal Priest. God had prescribed that the Ark should be made out of incorruptible wood, and that within it should be lined with the purest gold, thus signifying to us what entire freedom from the smallest taint of corruption, and what riches of grace and ineffable holiness He would require on the part of her, who was to shelter within her His own beloved Son.

His conduct towards Mary is marked by a deep reverence for that hallowed flesh, from which the flesh of Christ is to be taken. A virgin in the conception of the Word

Incarnate, a virgin at His birth, she remains a virgin for ever.

We could almost *a priori* say, with a group of Breton theologians,[1] that the conception of the Son of God requires that the Divine Mother shall be a virgin. For how could virtue short of Divine bestow upon her such fecundity that her child shall be God begotten formally of her? The virtue which renders her maternity thus fruitful, must tend directly to produce a human nature united to a personality that is Divine. But such a power must itself be Divine. Mary must be the Spouse of the Holy Ghost. And this we know expressly from the reply which the Angel Gabriel gave to Mary's question: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" "The Holy Ghost," said he, "shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore the Holy [Babe] that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (St. Luke i, 35).

But it is not merely in Our Lord's conception that by a hitherto unheard of prodigy, Mary remains a spotless virgin. Jesus so loved the absolute purity of His Mother, that He is ready to multiply miracles, if need be, in order to preserve from the slightest taint of corruption that sacred flesh from which He will fashion for Himself His own human body. Mary is a virgin, too, in the birth of Christ. Our Lord by His coming into the world in no way

[1]Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in a paper read at the Marian Congress held at Nantes, in 1924.

impairs, but rather consecrates her virginal integrity. The Infant Saviour comes forth from Mary's breast like the sunbeam which penetrates the crystal, without marring it in any way or damaging it. Born as a ray of light, He passes from her bosom to her arms, close to her motherly lips. The Resurrection of our Divine Lord, wherein He issued from the tomb without disturbing the rock that barred the entrance, and without breaking the seal, offers a parallel to His virginal birth, save that in the former the sole motive for the miracle that was wrought was the glory of the Son of God, whereas in the latter God provided at the same time for the honor and dignity of Mary.

Now, if Christ is so jealous of the absolute integrity of His Virgin Mother, as to bring into play His own omnipotence, in order to preserve it even by extraordinary prodigies, does it not appear utterly incredible that He should end by suffering that same virginal flesh, once so highly honored and so wonderfully glorified, to become the food of worms, and after crumbling into dust, to lie for centuries all unreverenced in a forgotten and uncertain tomb?

But if Mary's hallowed body was preserved from the corruption consequent upon death, it must surely have been raised to life again after a brief interval, and at once glorified. For Mary's body to have remained intact without being reunited to her soul, would have demanded a continual miracle. On the other hand, given the union in Mary of her body and her glorified soul, the result would immediately have been the imparting by the latter to the

former of all those wondrous gifts, by which, in the resurrection of the just, their bodies shall be, so to say, spiritualized. For if this transformation will take place in the case of all the elect, how much more may we affirm it of her, whose flesh was so exceedingly exalted, even during her earthly existence—divinized, we may say—by the sublime mysteries of the Incarnation, and Birth of Christ, and all the astounding intimacies which these involved?

Chapter XX

Mary's Extraordinary Sanctity And the Assumption

IN the fifteenth Psalm, verse the tenth, the inspired Psalmist, speaking in the person of Christ, says, addressing the Father: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption." The words, no doubt, refer directly to our Blessed Lord: He is the Holy One whose stainless flesh will not be permitted to moulder in the earth, but will speedily rise again to a new and glorious life. But they are applicable, also, to Mary: for she, too, is holy, and her flesh, from which the flesh of Christ was taken, is likewise without the slightest taint of sin or disorder of any kind.

It will be to the purpose to quote here the language of the Bull *Ineffabilis,* whereby the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin became a dogma of our Faith and which furnishes us with such a wonderful and authentic encomium of Mary's sanctity. Not everything, it is true, that is contained in the Bull, has for us the same binding force as that particular doctrine which is expressly proclaimed, nevertheless we plainly see from other weighty assertions that are made in the course of the document what is the mind of the Church, and what should be our estimate of those prerogatives which give to Mary her

unique position among all the saved. God, it is said in the Bull,

from the beginning and before all ages chose and prepared for His Only-begotten Son a Mother, of whom He should be born in the fulness of time, and bestowed such love upon her in preference to all other creatures, that in her alone He gladly took the fullest complacency. Hence He endowed her far beyond the whole host of Angelic spirits and all the saints with an abundance of Heavenly gifts from out the treasures of the Godhead, bestowing them upon her with such a wonderfully lavish hand, that she was ever absolutely free from any taint of sin, and all fair and perfect, exhibiting a fulness of innocence and holiness, than which no greater is conceivable under God, and which none but God can fully comprehend. And, indeed, it was highly proper that so venerable a Mother should ever shine refulgent with the splendors of the most perfect holiness, and by her complete immunity even from original sin should thoroughly triumph over the old serpent, seeing that God the Father, who had begotten His only Son to an equality with Himself out of His own heart, and who loved Him as Himself, had decreed to bestow Him upon her in such a way that one and the same should be by nature the common Son of God the Father and the holy Virgin.

Could anything be said that would add to this authoritative affirmation of Mary's sanctity? Sanctity is the fruit of union with God, and that union in Mary's case is effected not merely by sanctifying grace, and other supernatural gifts—in which others share, some more, some less, but of which she possesses the fulness—but it is also the result of the Incarnation within her bosom of the Son of God, a privilege and a glory quite incommunicable to

others, and which exalt her to a height of holiness where she stands absolutely alone.

Now, in the present order of Providence, the corruption of the body is the penalty of sin, and hence has no place where there is utterly no shadow of sin, but, on the contrary, an amazing and to us inconceivable holiness. To others grace has been given, but not with the same fulness; upon Mary the whole plenitude of the grace that is in Christ, though otherwise, has been poured out with unstinted liberality.

That of itself is more than sufficient to put far from Mary the possibility of corruption in the tomb. For the plenitude of grace embraces all those Divine gifts which are in keeping with the actual order established by God in regard to Mary and her place in the scheme of Redemption, and hence, while it does not include immunity from death, it does by all means demand that her resurrection be prompt and glorious.

But the sublime and quite extraordinary sanctity of Our Lady furnishes us with another powerful motive for our faith in her entire and speedy glorification. If with the Church we may fearlessly proclaim her full of innocence and holiness, than which no greater is conceivable under God, then surely we must recognize in her the "Blessed among women," whose blessing frees her from the curse that is upon the rest of mankind, condemning them to return into the dust from which they have been taken.

But this is not all. Grace such as Mary's does not merely set her free from the primeval curse; it also wonderfully exalts her. Grace and glory are intimately related to each other, in as much as grace is the beginning of glory, and glory is the consummation or finishing of grace. Whence it follows, that she who was, so to say, steeped in grace—for whom it was, as it were, the very atmosphere which she breathed—must have passed at once from this mortal life to that of glory without experiencing the corruption of the grave. Thus the Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven in body and soul is guaranteed by her incomparable grace and holiness.

Chapter XXI

Mary in Heaven

ONE of the ablest and most ardent exponents of the doctrine of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady, Father Guido Mattiussi, S.J., insists with emphasis on the utterly inadmissible consequence that follows from its denial. If only Mary's soul is in Heaven, then Mary is not there herself. For the soul, albeit the principal part of our human nature, is not our nature whole and entire. Strictly speaking, then, if Mary's precious body has not been taken up into Heaven along with her stainless soul, she is not there in person, personality being the last complement of an intellectual or rational nature.

And yet how could we possibly reconcile this with our conception of Mary as even now in the fullest sense our Mother and the Mother of Our Lord? Surely a disembodied spirit does not correspond to this idea, nor is it what occurs to our mind, when, as children, we lovingly invoke Mary's aid.

The same must be said of that other conception of Our Lady as the universal Queen. Nothing is commoner with us than to speak and think of Mary as our Queen. We so address her in the most popular of her antiphons, in another of which she is invoked under the august title of

Queen of Heaven, while in her Litany she is styled Queen in particular of every order of the Blessed.

This universality embraces in a special manner the choirs and hierarchies of the Holy Angels. Mary is Queen of all the Angelic Host. And if we reflect for a moment on the beauty and splendor of those glorious natures, perfect from the outset in everything that appertains to them, how incongruous it must seem, that she who rules over them as their most gracious and beloved sovereign, should be not only of an inferior nature—for that is more than compensated for by the admirable gifts of grace—but should in that nature itself be lacking in an essential part, and a substantial complement, and doomed to wait for their bestowal even to the end of time! Such an incongruity in what is in other respects a perfect masterpiece of the Divine workmanship, is simply unthinkable. As in the case of Christ Himself God has anticipated the day of the general resurrection of the dead, in order to put Him at once in possession of the full recompense which He merited by His death, so in the case of Mary, though, to be sure, for a less compelling motive, God did not await the end of the world in order fully to glorify her, but quickly raising her from the tomb, and endowing her with a new and marvelous life, presented her from the first as a companion worthy in all respects to be associated with her Divine Son.

We read in Psalm xliv, 10: "The Queen stood on thy right hand." These words, with other occurring in the

same Psalm, have, not uncommonly and by no means ineptly, been applied to Mary. She is the Heavenly Queen of whom the Psalmist sings, and she is stationed at the right hand of her Son in His everlasting kingdom. To this permissible application of the text Holy Church adds her sanction, by accommodating the words to our Blessed Lady in her liturgy. Hence, even though, in their first meaning, they refer to the Church, the Spouse of Christ, being the bridal song whereby we celebrate His nuptials with our human nature, nevertheless, they do truly express the mind of the Church with regard to the surpassing glory which Mary enjoys in the kingdom of her Son.

And what properly is the signification of the expression "stood at thy right hand," that is to say, at the right hand of Christ, about whom the Psalm is chiefly written, and to whom in large part it is addressed? An almost identical expression is often used elsewhere with reference to Our Lord Himself. Thus at the close of the Gospel of St. Mark, we are told that the Lord Jesus "was taken up into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God."

And St. Paul, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, says of the Incarnate Son, through whom God has spoken to us in these latter days that He "sitteth at the right hand of Majesty in the highest." His exaltation to such a height far above the unnumbered hosts of Angels corresponds to the greater dignity of His name. As compared with that of those glorious spirits, He is the Only-begotten Son; they are but servants, zealously ac-

complishing in all things the will of God. But never did He say to any of the Angels: "Thou art my Son; today I have begotten thee." Or again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son." And never even to the mightiest of the Angels did He say: "Sit on my right hand, until I make thy enemies thy footstool."

Of Christ alone it may be said that *He sitteth at the right hand of God.* This implies, if we consider Him as God, that He has the same glory, the same beatitude, the same power as the Father, and that they are possessed by Him unchangeably in an everlasting repose. Or if we regard Him in His human nature, here, too, the session of which we speak expresses *rest* in the assured possession of greatness, beatitude, might—inferior, it is true, to those of God, but such that no other glory, no other beatitude, no other power, can so much as even approach them.

If now we apply this, with due proportion, to Mary, we shall infer that for her to be enthroned in Heaven at the right hand of her Divine Son is to share with Him eternally His greatness, His beatitude, His power, in a word, all His goods. To be sure, they will be inferior to those of Christ; for the Divine Maternity is not on the same plane as the personal union of Christ with God. They will also be dependent on the merits of Christ, flowing from them, even as the greatness, the beatitude, and the power of the Son flow in upon Him from the Father as from their ultimate source. But Mary's share in the good things of her Divine Son far outstrips that of any other creature how-

ever excellent. As, then, Christ's sitting at the right hand of God is His incommunicable privilege, so it is the exclusive prerogative of Mary to be seated at the right hand of Christ, her Son, in His everlasting kingdom.

There can be no doubt, then, that Mary is a Queen in the strict sense of the word. She does, indeed, possess in a far higher degree what is characteristic of each and every order of the Blessed: for she is Queen of Angels, Queen of Patriarchs, Queen of Prophets, Queen of Apostles, and so of the rest; but she also rules with power over willing and devoted subjects. "All power is given to Me in Heaven and on earth" (St. Matt. xvii, 18), Our Lord declared to His disciples on the mountain in Galilee shortly before departing from them, and that power He has divided with His Blessed Mother, reserving to Himself the attribute of justice, and the apportionment of their due to each and every one in His capacity of universal Judge, but assigning to Mary the realm of mercy.

Mary is Queen of all the world—*Regina mundi dignissima,* as the Church sings. She is Queen of Heaven: once more to quote from the sacred liturgy, "The holy Mother of God has been exalted above the choirs of Angels to the Heavenly kingdom," and these blessed spirits rejoice at her Assumption, and praise and bless the Lord by reason of it.

Mary's dominion over Purgatory is beyond question. She can and does assuredly lighten the sufferings of her children, who are detained in that abode of grievous tor-

ment. She is the comfortress of the afflicted, and her tender compassion is not confined to those who suffer here, but embraces those also who in the other life are experiencing the rigors of the Divine justice, and the vengeance with which God pursues even our less serious transgressions.

Mary's power extends even to the abyss of the reprobate. However odious it may be for the demon to own himself vanquished by the Woman, it is impossible for him to gainsay the fact. Was it not foretold from the beginning that she should wage an incessant war against the wily serpent, and should prevail, and should crush his venomous head? Satan strives with murderous rage to destroy souls, and employs every artifice to involve them in his own ruin; Mary, on the contrary, ever aims at foiling his plans, and bringing his endeavors to nought. We have but to put ourselves under her protection, and we shall not perish.

She is Queen, too, of the human race here below—*Our Lady,* as we delight to call her—and her dominion over us is at the same time that of the tenderest and most solicitous of mothers. Great as was her power here, while she was still in the flesh, it has reached its climax now that she has been transported to Heaven, to a throne at the right hand of her Son. There, all bathed in Heavenly glory, she is ever mindful of her poor banished children, and ever occupied with their needs and infirmities, nor can anything shake the confidence with which she intercedes in their

behalf, knowing that her Divine Son has made her the dispenser of all His graces.

And Mary's portion for herself—how shall we attempt to describe it? Would it not be to make light of the declaration of the Apostle and of the Prophet whom he quotes? Do they not assure us in express terms that "it hath not entered into the heart of man" what things God has prepared for the Blessed in Heaven? If, then, this is true of the eternal reward of the least of God's elect, how utterly hopeless it must be to seek to give any but the most inadequate idea of the blissful recompense which is Mary's now and for all eternity?

St. Augustine sums up the beatitude of the Saints in three words: *Videbimus, amabimus, gaudebimus;* that is to say, we shall *see* God, we shall *love* Him, and we shall *rejoice* in Him. Knowledge, love, joy—these are the three beatifying operations, and in each and every one of them, Mary far outdistances all the rest of the Blessed, being surpassed only by the Incarnate Word.

She exceeds all others, first of all, in her knowledge of God, which comes to her from beholding God face to face. This vision has for its measure the perfection of the light of glory, and this is proportioned to the degree of sanctifying grace. Since, then, Mary is so far superior to all the rest of the Blessed in grace, she looks with far more penetrating gaze into the depths of the Divine Being, discovering secrets there which other eyes are too feeble to discern. There is nothing hidden from Mary, whether in

the order of grace or in that of nature, and Suarez esteems "pious and probable" the opinion of those theologians who hold that Mary, in contemplating the Divine Essence, sees, by the same intuition, all that God Himself beholds by what is called *"the science of vision,"* and hence all creatures distinct from God, whatever may be their nature.[1] It need scarcely be added that this would not include the most intimate thoughts of the Man-God, except in so far as it might be His will to manifest them to her. And to whom would He be inclined to make known His secrets, if not to His loving Mother?

To Mary's knowledge corresponds intense love. She loved God here on earth, while still in the land of her banishment, with a love which surpassed that of the elect in Heaven: how ardent, then, must be the love with which she burns unceasingly toward that Divine object, now that she beholds it in a light incomparably more intense, and gazes rapturously into its depths.

From love there follows joy—in the presence of the loved one, and in whatever happiness befalls him. Spiritual joy, according to St. Thomas, is the fruit of charity. "For charity," he says, "is, on the one hand, the love of God, whose good is unchangeable, as it is infinite, since God is His own goodness; and on the other hand, God, by the very fact that He is loved, is present in him who loves." Since, then, the object of Mary's love is the Divine goodness, which is ever unchangeable and ever present to her,

[1]Cf. Terrien, S.J., *La Mère de Dieu,* Bk. 8, Ch. 5, p. 420.

her joy in the infinite good is beyond all bounds or measure.

It was not the same for Mary to know, more or less in the abstract, as she did in her mortal life, the infinite goodness and infinite beauty of God, and to see, as she does now in the clear light of the Beatific Vision, that wondrous beauty and goodness all revealed, no longer dimly and through a glass, but even as they are in themselves, and will be forever.

But apart from the essential happiness which comes to Mary in Heaven from the contemplation of the Divine Being, how ineffably sweet will be for her the sight of the sacred Humanity of her beloved Son, lit up with the light of glory, and radiant with a beauty surpassing that of the whole material universe! Mary was ever in her own eyes no better than the handmaid of the Lord, but now she sits enthroned in the highest Heaven, at once Queen and Mother, Queen of Heaven and Mother of the King. He may have seemed at times to disown her, or at least to show Himself cold toward her, during their mortal life, but it was only in appearance—she always understood—and oh! how whatever apparent slight there may have been is now compensated for a thousand times by the public and signal honor paid to her by the King, the Lord of Heaven and earth, and by all His glorious court.

She is Mother, too, of all the elect. They are her joy and her crown. What a sacrifice she was called upon to make for them, when she was asked to give up her Son to

a cruel death that they might live! And what a subject for sweet rejoicing it is to her now to see, in their victory over the old and malicious serpent, the happy fruit of her unspeakably generous sacrifice of herself and of her Son!

Mary is in Heaven both in body and in soul. The word *Assumption* implies as much. It is not question merely of her soul, which was at once glorified the moment she yielded it up into the hands of her Son, but her stainless flesh itself has been endowed with a new life, and received into Paradise, without experiencing the horrors of the grave.

Is this the exclusive privilege of the Mother of God? There are some who would extend it to others—those chiefly who are referred to in the Gospel of St. Matthew (xxvii, 52, 53)—but the majority of theologians would confine it to Christ's Blessed Mother. And if we would know what this anticipated resurrection and glorification mean for her, we must reflect on what has been revealed to us concerning the glorified humanity of Christ. For that is the pattern after which all the bodies of the elect must be remodeled on the day of the great readjustment, when God shall render to every one according to his works.

Now there are certain qualities which manifest themselves in the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord, all of which, without in reality changing the nature of His risen Body, make it wonderfully like a spirit. Such are the qualities of subtilty and agility. The closed doors do not prevent Our Lord from standing suddenly in the midst of His dis-

ciples on the evening that followed His Resurrection, as He had not been prevented from passing at dawn of day through the stone that closed the entrance of His tomb. And as this was due to the gift of subtilty, so it was in virtue of that of agility, that He rose up Heavenward from Mt. Olivet in the presence of His disciples on the day of His glorious Ascension. This quality implies a certain independence of the conditions of matter, among which is the law of gravitation. The glorified body is free in its movements, and ranges at will through the unmeasured spaces of the heavens. For the body that "is sown in weakness shall rise in power."

St. Paul further assures us that "Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more: death shall no more have dominion over Him" (Romans vi, 9), and in the famous fifteenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he says, among other things, that even our lowly body shall rise in incorruption, in glory, and in power—in a word, that it shall rise a spiritual body.

As for the beauty of the risen bodies of the saints in Heaven, we gather from the mystery of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, and the ecstatic joy of the disciples who beheld the glorious scene, how entrancing and how extraordinary that beauty must be. Only a glimpse of Christ's features had been vouchsafed to the chosen Apostles, and it had so impressed itself upon their souls, that for many years afterward they retained a most vivid memory of it.

Finally, the operations of the senses will not be want-

ing in the glorified body. Each sense will have its own perfection, and God will abundantly provide all that is requisite for its exercise. We cannot attempt to suggest what will be the nature of those sensible delights, which after all will be but the least part of the recompense of the just. We are warned of the futility of any effort to do so. For "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for those who love Him."

One thing we are sure of: Mary's share in the bliss of Paradise holds, in every respect, the preeminence. Only one exception need we make in favor of the Sacred Humanity of Christ, who is at once God and Man. How gladly does He invite her, on this day of her glorious Assumption, to come and receive at His hands the crown to which her surpassing merit and unexampled dignity justly entitle her!

Oh! if we could but witness, even from afar, the splendors of the Coronation of our Heavenly Queen! How the pomp of all earthly pageants would pale in comparison, and how, with the saints most devoted to Mary, we should long for the day to come which is to unite us to her in the everlasting joys of Heaven!

Her power, which reached its climax on the day of her Assumption, is ever exerted in favor of her children, and her omnipotent intercession is itself the kingdom of love wherein she embraces the whole race of men.